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SAFETY PAYS: FARMERS COOPERATIVE SAFETY RODEO

What are some of the most important aspects of a business that lead to success? If you ask any business owner, you might hear things like passion, work ethic, or even a detailed business plan. Though these things are vital, there is one aspect that typically doesn't get enough credit: *safety*.

Over the last decade, Farmers Cooperative — a conglomerate of five large-scale farming companies — has dedicated time each year to ensuring all employees have proper safety training. From small demonstrations and seminars to dedicated days of education, keeping employees aware of proper safety procedures and practices has no doubt contributed to their success as a business. Tom Hermance, safety department manager, agrees safety should always remain a core value, no matter the industry.

For the past three years, Farmers Cooperative has hosted a week-long "Safety Rodeo," twice a year. Every spring and fall, these events are a culmination of everything they have learned from other forms of safety training. Featuring scenario based, hands-on training, employees are exposed to real-life situations and are taught how to handle them in accordance with proper safety guidelines. In the months leading up to these events, a dedicated safety leaders team consisting of employees from all departments come together to discuss ideas. "Together, we use experience gained throughout each and every day to decide what forms of training to focus on," says Hermance. "It's now more structured and consistent training than ever before."



In the spring, the first event of the year covers all things agronomy. It's vital that Farmers Cooperative employees are prepared for any situation they may find themselves in during the growing season. "We break down over 200 employees into small groups to ensure that they are able to truly engage with the presented scenarios," says Hermance. Courses last around four hours, with sessions in the morning and afternoon.

The scenarios presented by training staff range from mild to severe. For example, employees must learn how to properly inspect anhydrous ammonia nurse tanks, how to attach and fill them, and what PPE is required to do so. Later in the course, they will then need to learn how to avoid a potential catastrophic failure in any of the equipment as well as emergency evacuation procedures.

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FEEDLOTS AND THE DANGERS OF BLIND SPOTS

The farm and the agriculture industries continue to be a high-risk environment for workers and other individuals. Agricultural workers sustain high rates of injury, as well as a higher severity level of injury. Worker turnover tends to be a contributing factor where the overall experience level is diluted due to this revolving door effect. Many agribusiness companies just cannot find experienced workers or simply, cannot find individuals that want to work. The same holds true for America's feedlots where they also experience high injury rates. Many individuals come to feedlots with minimal or no experience and little to no safety training, especially regarding training for feedlot-specific hazards.



According to the University of Nebraska Medical Center's College of Public Health, (1) "the occupational fatality rate in the beef cattle ranching and farming industries (including feedyards) was 116 fatalities/100,000 workers in 2014. This rate was four times higher than the rate in the agriculture, forestry, and fishing sector overall and 34 times higher than the rate in all industries combined." The need for specific feedlot safety training is real.

Feedlot workers will operate in tight quarters when handling livestock or even operating vehicles and equipment. This traffic can include feed trucks, ATVs,

tractors, semi-trucks, and pickups. Not to mention, there is additional traffic that includes pen-riders, workers, and other visitors to the site.

To handle the movement and activity, feedlots can establish a plan to assist workers when navigating the site. Ongoing training with constant worker reminders can be used to minimize incidents.

Feedlots, and other agricultural sites with similar congested traffic activity, all share the dangers of operator blind spots that can lead to a near miss, collision, or back-over incident. A typical blind spot is the area to rear and sides of a vehicle that cannot be seen by the driver. This includes the obstructed

view for the operator's side and rear-view mirrors. The vehicles size and other attached equipment can also affect the driver's visibility.

For instance, when behind the wheel of a feedlot feed truck, (2) the driver's blinded view extends outward approximately 25' before the driver can see the ground. That means someone who's 5'8" or 5'9" can easily be hidden in that blind spot and the feed truck driver won't have any idea he's there. These blind spot conditions also exist while operating other vehicles or equipment such as pickups, payloaders, and bucket trucks. Many times,

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The course finishes with a performance evaluation and conversation. According to Hermance, "the intention of the performance evaluation and conversation is twofold: to properly document attendance, and to measure individual strengths or weaknesses that need to be addressed."

Once fall approaches, it's time for an entirely different set of employees to undergo their own version of what Farmers Cooperative calls the "Harvest Rodeo." Like the spring session, employees are put through a course featuring scenario-based training. Harvest season brings its own set of potential hazards, and employees are encouraged to know how to prevent or mitigate hazards.

One scenario in particular covers fire extinguisher operation. The training staff have an area where controlled burns are ignited, and employees must use an extinguisher to put out the flames within a certain amount of time. Other scenarios include confined space entry, which focuses on harness safety and procedures, and grain quality examination, allowing employees to properly identify the quality of grains to better identify potential issues.

Many of these scenarios are presented to help employees understand safe operation and procedures. A common theme is preventative maintenance over everything else. "We often remind all our employees who go through this

workers on foot will assume these operators can clearly see them, but most times, this is not the case.

What can feedlots do to lessen the occurrence of blind spot related accidents? Technological advancements like newer agricultural equipment and vehicles equipped with rearview cameras have reduced the number of blind spots dramatically. These cameras help operators identify other workers and other stationary objects behind them while backing. As a simpler solution for worker detection, employers can require the use of high visibility clothing while walking around onsite. Any visitors with limited knowledge of the site should have an escort, especially when vehicle and equipment traffic is heavy.

OSHA has compiled a list of ways to address the dangers of blind spots that lead to back-over incidents in agricultural settings (3). Employers should:

- Regularly assess each work location to determine if a traffic control plan is needed.
- Establish drive-through or circular turnaround areas. If this is not possible, provide adequate space for operators to perform a three-point turn.
- Ensure that all turnaround areas are level, firm, and well drained to prevent vehicles from tipping over.
- Determine if a backup camera or system is needed.
- Never allow workers to eat lunch or rest near active working vehicles and equipment.
- Identify where workers might stand or walk unexpectedly.

- Determine if a spotter is required.
- Instruct workers and operators not to use personal mobile phones, headphones or any items that could create a distraction.

Ongoing training should be used to educate operators and employees of blind spot dangers. Employers can first ensure all employees are proficient in the operation and movement of the vehicles and equipment they will use. If equipped, check that all backup sensor alarms and horns work properly, and always back up slowly to allow foot traffic to get out of the way. The training should not stop with operators. Employers should train all employees on foot to stand where they can view the vehicles mirrors to allow operators to see them and to never stand for extended time periods around moving vehicles and equipment.

Injuries to workers and visitors can happen in many ways. Do not forget to assess the vehicle traffic and equipment movement on your site to determine the safest areas of movement for those on foot. Taking a little time to create a site traffic plan will go a long way in preventing blind spot accidents.

1. <https://www.unmc.edu/publichealth/feedyard/feedyard/index.html>
2. The Jamestown Sun 8/29/2020
3. <https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/publications/OSHA3840.pdf> ●



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training that their safety is our core value. In other words, don't be a hero," says Hermance.

As the week-long training comes to an end, the safety leaders team comes together once again to identify the overall success as well as what could be done differently. Additionally, survey cards are handed out to employees asking them what they liked and what they didn't. "Every year we try to raise the bar," says Hermance.

When asked how these rodeos have affected the overall safety of employees at Farmers Cooperative, Hermance says

it's truly made an impact. "A lot of our employees have expressed their interest to learn through these events. They want to get better at what they do, while also being as safe as possible. The payoff is a safer work environment and we go home to our families at night."

Hermance says they are already preparing for this year's Harvest Rodeo. With the spring event finished, ideas for the fall are beginning to come to life. Some of the upcoming scenarios will focus on emergency first aid, air quality monitoring, and more. ●



TRACK MAINTENANCE AND INSPECTION

Tracks and siding, whether owned or leased, should be inspected twice a year by a qualified third-party rail contractor and all corrections identified on an inspection report should be made. In addition, a monthly documented visual inspection of track (including gauge and alignment), switches, ballast, ties, and joints should be conducted by an employee who has been trained to complete such inspections. Your third-party inspector or railroad safety representative will be able to complete this training with your designated employees.

Standard track gauge is 56 1/2 inches. Gauge must be a minimum of 56 inches and maximum of 58 inches. Gauge is measured 5/8 inches below the top of the rail. Check conditions of ties to determine any movement and if movement is evident, add the amount measured to the initial gauge measurement. Alignment describes track that has moved from its original position. It is measured by stretching out a 62-foot string measuring the deviation at the middle. The deviation should not be more than five inches. This can be caused by heat expansion of the rail or equipment striking the track and moving it out of alignment. Track should be aligned to avoid a difference in gauge measurement.

Good ballast will ensure that tracks have a good foundation, maintain good alignment, and allow for proper drainage. When inspecting tracks, check for fouled or muddy ballast. Poor ballast conditions cause uneven working surfaces and poor track conditions.

Cross ties hold gauge and help maintain track surface. Problems that could arise with ties are split ties where ballast could work through, broken ties, deteriorated ties, and ties cut more than 40% by the tie plate. There should be at least five non-defective ties within a 39-foot tangent section of the track or six in a curve greater than four degrees. Joint bars must be replaced when cracked or broken between the middle two bolt holes. When bolts are missing, they should be replaced immediately. At a minimum, there must always be at least one bolt in each rail end. Ensure that joints bolts are tight. At the joint, the end of the rail must not be mismatched by more than 1/4 inch.

Other items to inspect monthly include:

- Adequate railbed drainage. Drainage must be given special attention at the following locations: switches, crossings, and other places with limited vertical and side clearance.
- Vegetation must be kept to a minimum. A weed control program should be in place to control vegetation growth in and around tracks. Excessive brush and weeds should not be allowed.
- Derails should be properly secured in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations where required.
- Bumping posts shall be properly maintained. If earthen bumping posts are used, they should be located 10 feet from the end of track, with 10 ties in front of and all ties behind it fully anchored.
- For road crossings, rail joints shall be kept clear of crossings and where practicable should not be located closer than 25 feet from the edge of the crossing. Drainage of the track at crossings must be properly maintained at all times.
- Maintain a flangeway space of no more than three inches or less than two inches deep, and not less than two and a half inches or more than three inches wide.
- Crossing sightlines are to comply with all regulatory requirements.

If your business success relies on a track system, you can't afford an accident, malfunction, or delay. The performance of your track can have a real impact on business, so keeping up with maintenance schedules and ensuring everything is working at the highest level is critical. ●



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TORNADOES, SEVERE STORMS, AND HEAT STRESS – ARE YOU PREPARED?

The summer months bring an increased risk to your employees and property. If you haven't reviewed your Emergency Action Plan (EAP), now may be a good time.

The purpose of an EAP is to provide procedures and give guidance and instructions for responding to workplace emergencies. The EAP's goal is to ensure employee and visitor safety and to protect property. The Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) requires written EAP's for many businesses. Depending on what your business entails, you could have any number of emergencies (i.e.- Medical, Fire, Grain Engulfment/Entrapment, Chemical or Petroleum Spills/Leaks, Anhydrous Exposure/Release, Tornado/Severe Weather, Blizzard, Heat Stress, Hypothermia, Robbery, and more) that require procedures in place to be able to handle these situations when they arise.

Beyond compliance, there are many reasons to have a solid preparedness program. A well-developed EAP can result in fewer and less severe injuries, less damage to property, and alleviate confusion before, during, and after an emergency which can make a bad situation worse and put lives and property at risk. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) states that up to 40 percent of businesses affected by a disaster never reopen and another 25 percent that do reopen fail within a year. Having an effective EAP in place can help your business survive.

When reviewing your EAP, it is essential that all the potential risks are identified and the plan be site specific with respect to emergency conditions evaluated, evacuation policies and procedures, emergency reporting mechanisms, and alarm systems. Employees, locations, layouts, property, and assets all change and with that the EAP needs to change as well to reflect those changes. Keep a copy of your emergency action plan in a

convenient location where employees can get to it, and/or provide a copy to all employees. Your EAP provides no benefit if it sits on a shelf collecting dust, instead it needs to be shared with the entire company because:

- Every employee needs to know the plan so they can follow it in case of an emergency.
- Management needs to provide whatever resources are necessary to follow the plan.
- The plan needs to be reviewed so improvements can be made on an ongoing basis.
- Training needs to be provided and if able, to practice emergency procedures.
- Employees should follow the plan in an actual emergency quickly and efficiently.

Being proactive with your summer emergency preparedness is key to helping avoid — or least reduce — the amount of risk and loss you may encounter due to tornadoes, severe storms, and heat stress. Your EAP review will not only help for this season but the next ones as well. Remember, the actions you or your employees take in the initial minutes of an emergency are critical.

There are many resources available to review, update, or create your EAP. If you have any questions or need further assistance, consult your safety professional, an outside safety organization, your insurance agent, or risk consultant. ●



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4 HELPFUL STEPS IN THE EVENT OF PROPERTY LOSS

Property losses can range from very minor damages like a few shingles blown from a roof to a total loss of a facility from a tornado. Regardless of the size of the claim, there are some important things you can do that will be helpful in working through the claim with an insurance company. Listed below are some of the items to consider when you have a loss.

Report the claim immediately to your agent

This helps get the claim set up and give you guidance in an event of a loss.



Take photos of the damages

Photos can help document the loss, determine what exactly is damaged and how. These photos can be used by millwrights and the working adjuster in determining

what needs to be repaired or replaced from a loss. Sometimes the area may change over time, therefore, having timely photos will help document the damages accurately.

Mitigate your loss

If possible, try to protect the area from further damages due to the loss. Remove any overhead hazards and secure the area that sustained damages. This may include utilizing a crane to remove loose metal from overhead. It can also include picking up debris from the ground to prevent flying objects due to wind or tarping areas to prevent interior damages. Come up with temporary ways to continue to operate business as best as possible and get areas back up and running.



Document your loss

Make a list of items damaged from the occurrence. This list should include the year, make, size, capacity, and model. If possible, having receipts related to the items is helpful, too.



Completing these four simple steps when you have a loss will assist in making the claim process go smoothly and without a hitch. ●

