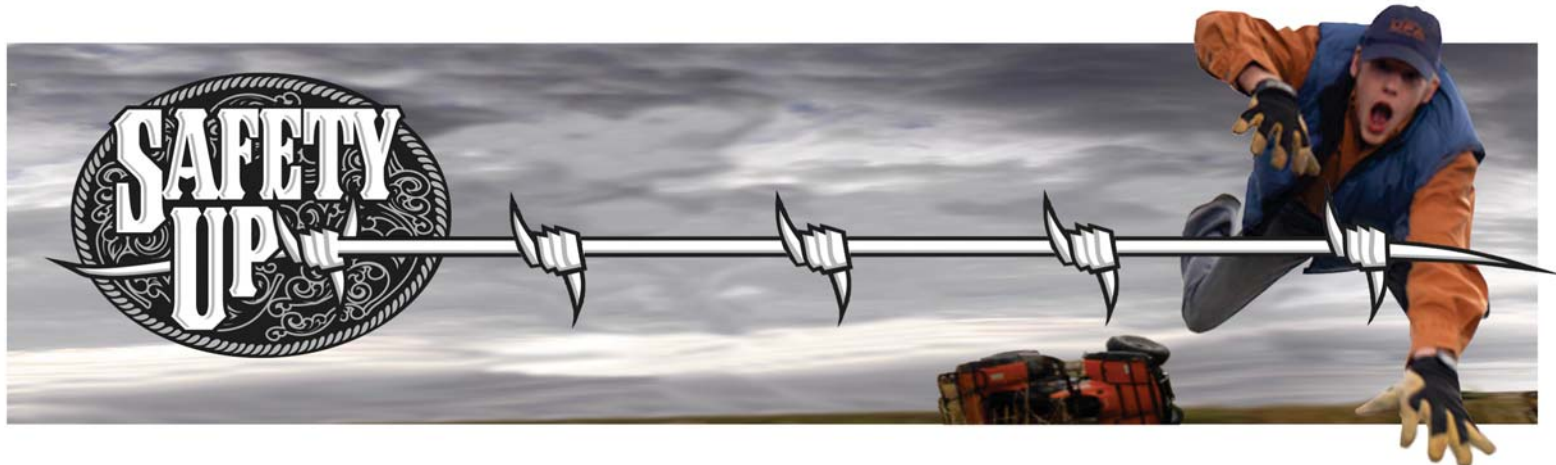




Safety Up – On Working Alone

When seasons are short, days are long, and assistance is scarce, working alone is sometimes the only option. Such is the life of the farm worker – you often find that you are forced to work alone out of necessity.

Some tasks are designed to be performed alone (such as driving a tractor), but other tasks are much safer when completed with help. Working alone does have an upside. It can be peaceful and productive – no one looking over your shoulder, no one to distract you from the task at hand. On the other hand, it can also result in tragedy – such as injury, health impairment or victimization.

To ensure your safety on the farm, you and your employer need to work together to plan safety measures to be used when working alone. Once your employer provides the plan and the tools to carry it out, the next step is for you to take responsibility for your own safety. **Know the job. Know the hazard. Know the drill.**

Three steps to safe work

Knowing the job means getting trained ahead of time to ensure you can do your work safely. Once you're on the job, you need to **know the hazard**: be alert to recognize potential problems that may put you or coworkers at risk. Finally, when you identify hazards, you need to **know the drill** – how will you safely manage or avoid them?

Training – who needs it?

Before you even consider working alone on the farm, you need to have the correct training for the job. Driving a tractor, moving grain, managing livestock – along with all the other tasks you take on in agriculture – involve knowledge and skills that ensure you can accomplish the work effectively and safely. Don't head out alone unless you **know the job**.

Lone worker alert

Sometimes, no amount of caution and preparation can make a work-alone situation safe. In these cases, never work alone. This includes any type of truly hazardous work, such as:

- Tasks involving high-energy sources: electrical, mechanical or pneumatic.
- Jobs involving toxic chemicals, or reactive or flammable materials.
- Using highly pressured materials.
- Jobs involving a confined space.

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Independence day

The hazards of working alone are broader than you may at first think. You could be injured, suffer a stroke or heart attack, be struck by lightning, or be victimized through criminal violence or other adverse conditions. Part of the risk is the delay between an incident happening and help being available. When you work alone, it could be hours before another farm worker becomes concerned about you, longer still before you are found, possibly in very poor condition. Whether it's a mechanical breakdown, power take-off (PTO) injury, heart attack or fire, the outcome is less optimistic if you are working alone when it happens.

Take responsibility for your safety. At the start of a new workday, consider the tasks you will perform, and plan accordingly. You need to know the answers to some important questions before you head out:

- In what situations will you be working independently?
- If your equipment breaks down or you need operational assistance, who will help?
- How will you communicate the need for help?
- Who can provide medical attention if you need it?
- Does someone nearby know first aid and CPR?
- Who can call a paramedic?
- Is someone aware of your whereabouts?

Know the drill

In many cases, farm incidents would have considerably better outcomes if emergency help – or any help at all, for that matter – was available to the victim before the situation escalated. The key is to plan how you and your coworkers will respond to an incident before it happens.

Know the drill.

The following strategies can prevent working-alone incidents and minimize the damage should one occur:

- Ask your employer for a clear and concise working-alone policy.
- Ask for instructions and training on working alone.
- Ensure appropriate supervision is available.
- Don't work alone without the means to communicate – cell phones, pagers or two-way radios.
- Check in regularly while you're alone in the field.
- Know who will assist you if something goes wrong.

- Leave tough or hazardous tasks to be completed when help is available.
- Ensure those working alone are capable of controlling the risks of the job.
- Ensure lone workers are medically fit and properly trained.
- Incidents can happen during low-risk work also, so you should still set time limits and check in regularly.

The last word

Working alone can be highly productive and enjoyable, or lonely and dangerous. It's up to you to decide how you will handle independent work situations for yourself. Take personal responsibility for your safety on the job. Don't head out without knowing your boss's working-alone policy. Ensure you have the proper training and tools for the job, a trustworthy communication device, and plans to check in regularly.

References

The Lone Worker, Farm Safety Association Inc., April 2001.

Farm Safety Association, Ontario.

Checking up or checking in?

It's always better to check in than to check up. When you check in regularly, your supervisor will feel less need to check up. All it takes is a short phone call, quick walk around, prearranged meeting at break time, or two-way radio contact. If your boss doesn't respond, it could mean that he or she needs *your* help. When you take responsibility for checking in, you do it for the safety of everyone in the field.