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Farm Safety

Saskatchewan Children and Farm Injuries

Farming is a unique industry because it functions as both a workplace and a home and, therefore, accepts the regular presence of children. On the farm, children are exposed to heavy machinery, dangerous chemicals, livestock, and numerous other hazards. It is the responsibility of all adults on the farm to protect children from these hazards.

Child injury on the farm is a serious problem in Saskatchewan. The Saskatchewan Comprehensive Injury Surveillance Report, 1995-2005 outlines the threat to children on Saskatchewan farms.

- 58 children, 0-19 years of age, died as a result of farm injuries in Saskatchewan.
- 50% of fatal farm injuries in children and youth were a result of being runover by machinery or machinery rollovers.
- 91.7% of children and youth killed by farm injuries were male.
- 298 children and youth, 0-19 years of age, were hospitalized due to farm injuries.
- 77.2% of farm injury hospitalizations in youth, aged 0 - 19, were male.

The Cause

The causes of injury deaths and hospitalizations to Saskatchewan children are numerous. Machinery, livestock, recreational vehicles and dugouts are just some of the mechanisms that led to injury. The leading mechanism of injury in all ages was animal-related. Machinery entanglement, falls from machinery and being pinned or struck by machinery accounted for over 25% of farm injury hospitalizations in children and youth 0-19

years of age. Often the children were unsupervised, were in an unsafe environment, or were participating in work that was beyond their ability.

Injuries must not be seen as the result of an unavoidable "accident". Injuries are predictable and preventable. Identifying and isolating potential hazards and ensuring that all members of the farm family are knowledgeable about safety will minimize the risk of injury.

Parents are always concerned about their children's safety. However, farming is a demanding business, often with both parents involved in the workload. Younger children often accompany parents, while older children may participate in the work. Children must always be supervised and when the time is right, they should be properly trained before participating in the farm work.

The North American Guidelines for Children's Agricultural Tasks prepared by the National Children's Centre for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety should serve as a reference when determining at what age a child is ready to do certain tasks.

Farmers have many roles to play – biologist, horticulturist, veterinarian, accountant and heavy equipment operator. An equally important role is that of safety manager and inspector. Proper equipment maintenance, use of protective covers, and safety training for all people on the farm are vitally important for an injury-free farm workplace. The safety attitudes and awareness levels of adults on the farm will determine the safety of all farm family members.

Make the Farm a Safe Place to Work and Live

To improve safety on the farm, adults must:

- Allow no passengers on farm machinery.
- Secure hazardous areas such as dugouts, lagoon and livestock pens. These areas should be off-limits for children.
- Lock up pesticides, chemicals and other hazardous materials at all times.
- Keep buildings, ladders and stairs in good repair.

Education & Example

- Ensure that all family members, over 12 years of age, know how to shut off machinery.
- Children should be completely trained and competent in a particular task before they are assigned to the task.
- Ensure children are old enough, properly trained, and wearing appropriate clothing and safety equipment before operating recreational vehicles such as all-terrain vehicles, dirt-bikes and snowmobiles. Helmets must be worn at all times.
- Educate yourself and your children. Very young children can learn safety basics such as “off-limit” areas. Older children can learn why things are dangerous and how to deal with the danger.
- Support school programs and read safety publications to enhance the learning process. Parents must be willing to accept and encourage the safety techniques that children have learned.
- Be a good role model for children and practice safety every day.

Supervision is Key

- Always know where children are. While this may be difficult when both parents join in the farm work, it is essential for children’s safety.
- Young children need special protection. Babies, toddlers and preschoolers must be under the supervision of an adult at all times. Sometimes a fenced play area may be the only way to keep young children safe.
- Children do not always understand danger and lack the experience to make safe judgments. Young children do not have the ability to remember rules.
- Older children must continue to be properly supervised as they participate in farm activities.

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Information for this fact sheet was adapted from:

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