

## GENERAL SAFETY FOR AG WORKERS

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(For assistance, please contact EHS at (402) 472-4925, or visit our web site at <http://ehs.unl.edu/>)

This SOP provides general safety tips for agricultural workers. Other EHS SOPs address specific agricultural hazardous equipment/operations and are intended to supplement this information.

### **General Considerations**

- Do not work alone when performing tasks that are unusually hazardous.
- Do not eat or drink while working in areas with potential chemical and biological hazards. Wash hands prior to eating, drinking, or smoking. Store Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in areas free from chemicals, dirt, excessive moisture or heat, and other environmental factors that may contaminate or degrade the equipment.
- There is no guaranteed safe method to lift objects. There are, however, some universally poor lifting techniques. Unassisted, manual lifting of objects greater than a maximum of 51 pounds present an unreasonable risk of injury. This weight limit will decrease if lifting occurs at less than ideal angles, and if objects are oddly-shaped or difficult to maneuver. When lifting heavy or odd objects, distribute the weight by having other employees help, or use mechanical lifts. Avoid manual, unassisted lifting tasks that involve bulky objects, particularly those with no handholds; and those that require twisting or awkward body positions.
- Practice good housekeeping. Avoid the temptation to accumulate unneeded items and debris. Properly dispose of or recycle materials, equipment, chemicals, or other supplies that are no longer needed.
- Use seatbelts when operating vehicles and machinery, if so equipped.
- Use helmets when operating ATVs and riding horses.
- Prevent falls by:
  - Wearing slip resistant and sturdy footwear and keeping the footwear clean of mud and debris. Be aware of uneven ground or other trip hazards (i.e., holes).
  - Allowing plenty of time to complete chores. This reduces the need to rush.
  - Keeping farm machinery, grain bin and silo steps, and ladders free of mud, ice and snow buildup.
  - Making sure that adequate handrails are present to prevent falling from steps and fixed ladders.
  - Paying close attention to the job at hand. Many injuries result from physical and mental fatigue.

- Installing warning signs in areas that are constantly wet, muddy, icy and slippery. Areas that tend to be slippery (e.g., dairy cow milk parlor) should have slip-resistant floors.
- Including cleaning of mud, snow and ice from fall prone areas in the daily work routine.
- Locking-out and removing from service damaged or under-equipped ladders and steps.

### **Chemical Safety**

- Label all containers of chemical products, including water, with the identity of the contents. If the contents are hazardous, provide information on the specific physical (i.e., flammable, corrosive, etc.) and health hazards (i.e., toxic, poison, etc.), target organs, and PPE. See the EHS SOP, **Chemical Container Labeling**.
- Keep lids on containers of chemicals except when immediately adding or removing materials from the container.
- Wash hands after handling chemicals. When working in the field with chemicals, there should be some means of washing hands, as well as other parts of the body in the event of an accidental splash. Shops and storage/mixing stations for pesticides should be equipped with eyewash stations and emergency showers.
- Dispose of unwanted chemicals in a timely fashion and in consultation with EHS. Never discharge unwanted chemicals to the ground, septic tank, lagoon, or by air drying.
- Apply pesticides and rinsates only in accordance with label directions. Do not dump or apply excess rinsates or pesticides to road ditches or other areas as a means of disposal.

### **Emergency Preparedness**

- When working in a building, be aware of the location of emergency exits and equipment such as fire extinguishers, safety showers, eyewash stations, and telephones. Emergency equipment must be properly maintained, and employees must be familiar with how to use emergency equipment. Position work materials and equipment so as to not block access to exits and emergency equipment. Maintain a clear path of travel in case of emergency.
- Maintain an adequate stock of appropriate spill clean-up materials, and promptly clean up all chemical leaks or spills originating from the supplies. Seek assistance if the spill or leak poses an imminent danger to persons, facilities, or the environment. Consult EHS on the proper disposal of spill clean-up materials and residues.
- Know emergency response procedures and contact numbers for fires, explosions, natural gas leaks, tornados, lightening, medical emergency, etc. These procedures are available in the UNL Centrex and on the EHS web page. Conduct drills periodically.
- Track the location of employees working in the field and ensure that someone knows the expected time of return. Maintain a means of communication while working in the field (i.e., radio, cell phone, etc.).