

WORKPLACE SAFETY

'SAFER' PRINCIPLES

- See** → identify potential hazards to health and safety on the farm
- Assess** → decide the risk associated with the hazard
- Fix** → take appropriate action to control the risk
- Evaluate** → check your controls are effective
- Record** → record actions you take or plan



Everyone deserves a safe place to live and work and preventing injuries in the workplace should be a priority on the farm. The European Framework Directive on Safety and Health at Work (Directive 89/391 EEC) adopted in 1989 was a substantial milestone in improving safety and health at work. It guarantees minimum safety and health requirements throughout Europe, while Member States are allowed to maintain or establish more stringent measures.

The Directive obliges employers to take appropriate preventive measures to make work safer and healthier. It introduces as a key element the principle of risk assessment and defines its main elements (e.g. hazard identification, worker participation, introduction of adequate measures with the priority of eliminating risk at source, documentation and periodical re-assessment of workplace hazards). In Italy, where the current directive is Decreto Legislativo 30 April 2008, the institutional system of safety and health at work comes under the Ministry of Labour and Health, in conjunction with the Regional Coordination Committees and the social partners. Their responsibilities include delivering advice for legislative developments, supervision, promoting health and assisting businesses. Farm businesses that do not fulfil health and safety responsibilities face significant fines and penalties.

Agriculture is one of the most hazardous sectors. In the EU, non-fatal work-related accident rates are 1.7 times higher than the average, and the number of fatal occupational accidents is three times higher than the average.

For people working on farms, there are very busy periods, long days, a wide range of weather conditions and work with potentially hazardous equipment, environments and substances. Older and younger family members are quite often at greater risk of harm if exposed to these hazards.

The main causes of accidents include:

- transport (being run over or vehicle overturning)
- falling from height (through fragile roofs, from trees etc)
- struck by moving or falling objects (bales, trees etc)
- trapped by something collapsing or overturning
- livestock related accidents and fatalities
- exposition to chemicals, such as pesticides, veterinary drugs, solvents, and oils, which might in the long-term cause asthma, skin problems, harm to the nervous system, or cancer
- asphyxiation/drowning
- maintenance.

Because of the wide variety of buildings, installations, machinery, equipment and tools used in agricultural production, the hazards related to their maintenance are many and various, including:

- **mechanical hazards** related to the maintenance of machinery, such as crushing, entanglement and high-pressure fluid injection
- **electrical hazards** when working with defective equipment or during maintenance of electrical installations and equipment, or repair of broken electric fences

- **thermal hazards** related to the use of welding or heating equipment during maintenance, or maintenance of equipment with hot surfaces or operating fluids
- **chemical hazards** related to the use of dangerous substances during maintenance, or maintenance of equipment containing dangerous substances
- **fire or explosion hazard** during maintenance of facilities or equipment containing dangerous and explosive substances such as tanks, bins and silos, or fuel tanks
- **biological hazards** during maintenance of installations contaminated by biological agents, slurry tanks, ditches and sewage infrastructure.

Many farm injuries could be prevented or their impact reduced, if farmers wore proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

PPE is designed to protect many parts of the body, it does not prevent accidents, but prevents or reduces injury and even fatalities when used.

Definitions of equipment protection

- **Eye and face protection** - To provide protection during exposure to hazards like flying particles, metal or sparks, liquid chemicals, caustic liquids, light radiation, i.e., when welding.
- **Hearing protection** - To provide protection during exposure to high pitch and loud noise levels.
- **Respiratory protection** - To provide protection from inhalation hazards such as vapours, mists, particulates, pesticides, and gases.
- **Hand protection** - To provide protection during exposure to potential hazards such as sharp objects, abrasive surfaces, temperature extremes, and chemical contact.
- **Head protection** - To provide protection from potential hazards such as falling objects, striking against low-hanging objects, electrical hazards, or chemical application.
- **Foot protection** - To provide protection for situations with the potential of injuries such as falling or rolling objects, chemical or liquid exposures, piercing objects, and where feet are exposed to electrical hazards.
- **Clothing protection** - To provide protection from potential hazards such as entanglement, skin cancer, bodily injury, and pesticide contamination.

According to the types and extent of hazards, different PPE should be worn.



Sun protective sunglasses



Goggles



Safety glasses



Air purifying disposable particulate masks with exhalation valve



Gas masks with cartridge



Full face shields (FFS)



Pre-moulded earplugs



Protective footwear



Padded cloth gloves



Bump cap

Farm signs are an important part of farm safety. Placing warning signs around livestock, slurry, overhead cables, on the road margins when farm activity is in progress and to identify pesticides and chemicals around the farm makes the farm a safer place to work.

What is often taken as common sense to a farmer, may not be to other members of the public, who may not be aware of tractors, forklifts, livestock or other dangers in the farm area.

A farm needs both permanent warning signs and temporary signage such as signs warning of tree felling, or signs to put in fields according to what livestock is currently occupying them.

