

Safety on the farm



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Farming is a dangerous job and accidents can cause loss of earnings, fines and remedial work.

How can this change? One of the best ways to improve safety on the farm is through carrying out risk assessments. Risk assessments aren't as time consuming as you think, you probably carry them out every day in your mind without even realising. When you identify a potentially dangerous situation and plan how to avoid or change it, you should record it by writing it down, ultimately this is what staying safe on the farm is all about.

As a business owner who employs staff, contractors, seasonal workers and receives a helping hand from family members, it is best practice to create a formal risk assessment to comply with your legal obligations.

In this guide we've given some general farm safety tips to remind you what to think about when carrying out daily tasks. We've also included some more in-depth information covering specific areas:

- Working with livestock
- Transport and machinery safety
- Building safety and maintenance
- Handling and storing pesticides and other chemicals
- Working at height
- Working safely around Overhead Power Lines (OHPLs)
- Keeping children safe on farm

"We know risk assessments are something many business owners put off. The good news is it does not need to be a particularly difficult or time-consuming task. Assessing risk really just involves using your common sense to ensure you are taking reasonable steps to protect yourself, your employees and members of the general public."

Dominic Jones, Cornish Mutual Loss Prevention Team Leader



Working with livestock

Livestock can be unpredictable and can frequently cause serious injury, but taking some simple steps can reduce the risk of accidents and injuries:

- Use the right handling facilities required for the job and keep it in good working order, e.g. the correct race and crush for the animals being handled.
- Do your workers have the correct training and experience to work with your livestock? If not, make sure to supervise and help to train.
- Take time to compile a risk assessment for handling livestock, including the when, where, what and how.
- Consider removing especially aggressive or dangerous animals from the herd.
- Responsibility for safety extends to all those accessing your land, including those using public footpaths. Animals can quickly become dangerous when approached by those unfamiliar or inexperienced with animal behaviour. Try to minimise contact between the public and livestock and use signs where appropriate. To request a Dogs on Lead warning sign, please contact us on 01872 277151.



Transport and machinery safety



Did you know, being struck by a moving vehicle was the most common cause of accidental death on farms in 2019/20? To avoid unnecessary risks, farm vehicles and machinery must be well maintained and used correctly:

- Keep up with vehicle maintenance so your vehicles are safe and roadworthy every time you take them out.
- Does your vehicle have a seatbelt and do you use it? If not, consider fitting one and requiring it to be used by all drivers, even for short jobs around the yard as well as on public roads.
- Where possible, avoid reversing by providing turning circles or using one-way systems around the yards.
- Attach mirrors to the edge of buildings if there are blind corners on the farm.
- Follow the 'Safe Stop' procedure every time you leave, or anyone approaches, the vehicle or machinery.
- Remember all trailers over 750kg need working brakes and should be regularly serviced.
- Always lower implements, telehandlers, fore-end loaders or other front-mounted handling attachments to the ground after use.
- Keep vehicles away from pedestrians on the farm wherever possible, particularly children.

Safe Stop

- Engage the handbrake
- Put the controls in neutral
- Switch off the engine (or power)
- Remove the key (or lock off the power supply)

Source: [hse.gov.uk](https://www.hse.gov.uk)



Maintenance of buildings and storage areas

Ensuring buildings and storage areas are well maintained and housing stock and equipment safely, plays an important role in keeping your farm safe:

- Lay out storage areas to allow for the safe movement of stock, equipment and people.
- Consider pedestrian routes, aisles and gangways, stairs, ramps and emergency escape routes.
- Segregate people and vehicles in storage areas as much as possible.
- Construct floors and traffic routes in storage areas to withstand constant use, with effective drainage and resistance to spilled substances.
- Avoid slopes, holes and uneven or slippery surfaces that might cause a person to slip, trip or fall.
- Keep all areas clean and tidy.
- Have systems in place to clean up spillages quickly and safely.
- Ensure buildings are lit and ventilated appropriately, particularly when housing livestock or storing vulnerable materials/equipment (see 'Handling and storing pesticides and other chemicals').
- Check the electrical system regularly, particularly in buildings open to the weather.
- If the building used for storage contains asbestos, put a risk management plan in place.

Handling and storing pesticides and other chemicals

A chemical store is one of the most dangerous areas on a farm. These products should always be used and stored with care:

- Have a safety plan and control measures for storing chemicals on your farm, including a maintenance log and up-to-date inventory.
- Always follow the manufacturer's storage recommendations and safety data sheets. Check if the product has a danger label, whether it produces any harmful by-products and how to minimise them.
- Use appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), such as face shields, gloves and overalls.
- First aid equipment must be provided and, when handling chemicals, eyewash kits are a simple and effective way to give immediate treatment if splashes occur. You must ensure that none of the medical supplies are out of date.
- Beware of flammable substances and those which give off clouds of dust.
- Consider installing dust extractors/fresh air blowers.
- Provide training for all operators, including how to use and store each chemical safely and what to do in the event of a spillage.
- Store chemicals in leak-proof, fire-resistant buildings or cupboards, which should be locked at all times.
- Use shelving within a store to allow adequate space between products for easy access and identification. Powders and granulated products should be stored above liquids.
- Check a suitable bund of non-fragile, impermeable material, such as metal, concrete, bricks or stone slabs is in place.
- Use licensed waste disposal sites or contractors to dispose of chemicals and contaminated materials safely and legally.



Working at height

Working at height is an ever-present risk on farms and a common cause of accidents and serious injury. Here are some tips to help reduce the risks:

- Can part or all of the job be done at ground level? Avoid working at height whenever possible.
- If unavoidable, do you need to employ a professional contractor with the knowledge, equipment and experience to carry out the work safely? For example, tree work, where accidents are more common than in other areas of height-related injuries.
- Assess the risks at the outset and put appropriate preventative measures in place.
- Always use access equipment suitable for the task; this may mean scaffolding or a Mobile Elevated Work Platform (MEWP) rather than overloading ladders.
- It's illegal to be lifted by the forks or bucket of a telehandler.
- Reduce the distance and consequences of a fall by using safety nets, soft landing systems and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
- Make sure ladders have level, firm footings and are secured to prevent slipping; do not lean them against a fragile surface.
- Take steps to prevent any material falling from the work area, creating exclusion zones to keep people away.
- Employers are required to plan for emergencies and rescue.
- Working at height also applies if you are working below ground level. Is the access to any pit or ditch appropriate? Do you need to fence off or cover the ditch or pit when not being worked in?





Working safely around Overhead Power Lines

Accidents involving Overhead Power Lines (OHPL) are rarely minor and caused most often when large vehicles come into contact with live lines. Keep these guidelines in mind:

- Always assume a powerline is live until it is confirmed dead.
- Plan safe working sites and routes, and ensure staff receive relevant safety advice.
- Make sure anyone working alone, or in high-risk areas, carries a mobile phone with the electricity Distribution Network Operator's (DNO) phone number.
- Consult your DNO to map and record heights of OHPLs.
- Check the maximum operating height for machinery and equipment, including any equipment used by contractors.
- Avoid working within 10 horizontal metres of overhead power lines. Take particular care when using horizontal spray booms.
- Don't rely on rubber tyres or boots for protection.

What to do in the event of making contact with an OHPL

- If in a vehicle when the accident happens, stay in the cab and lower any raised parts and drive away if safe to do so.
- Do not touch an overhead line brought down by machinery or bad weather.
- Contact the DNO to disconnect the power supply or call 105, the national emergency number.
- Call the emergency services if there is serious and immediate risk.

Keeping children safe on the farm

Many farmers are keen to involve their children in farming activities, but it's important to assess the risks to younger family members. What is safe for adults may not be safe for children:

- Children under 13 should be supervised on the farm.
- Prevent children from entering a yard or pen occupied by potentially dangerous animals.
- Lock away veterinary medicines and application equipment.
- Encourage children to wash their hands after handling livestock.
- Make sure slurry pits, lagoons and reservoirs are properly fenced off and the fences are sturdy and in good repair. Signs are not enough; physical barriers are best for children.
- Cover and fence sheep dips.
- Secure tool and work equipment (see 'Maintenance of buildings and storage areas').
- Check gates are properly erected – loose gates become dangerous climbing frames.
- Store tractor wheels flat, stow ladders safely and prevent access to grain bins.
- Be particularly careful in areas where vehicles and machinery are in use, small children are harder for drivers to see.

At what age can children use agricultural vehicles and machinery?

- Under 13's: Not allowed to drive or ride on farm machinery such as tractors.
- Under 16's: Must not drive, operate or help operate machines such as towed or self-propelled harvesters, trailers or feed equipment and power-driven machines.
- Aged 13-16: Can drive agricultural vehicles under supervision if they have attended a training course and can reach and operate the controls easily.



Checklist for making your farm a safer place to work



Identify all working processes and equipment that could cause harm to you or your staff. Do this on a task-by-task basis watching how people work on specific tasks and asking those involved for their input.

Keep these questions in mind when you or one of your team is starting a new job. Taking short-cuts can be costly – even when doing what seems quick and easy:

- Are you using the right tools for the job?
- Are your equipment, machinery, vehicles and buildings well maintained and up to the job?
- Do you and your staff (including family members, casual workers and contractors) have adequate training for the job being done?
- Are you carrying out the task in the best way? Is there a safer alternative? Should you consider asking a professional to do it?
- Are you using the correct PPE and safety equipment?
- Have you kept your work area as clean and tidy as possible? Are your buildings well-lit and adequately ventilated?
- Do you need a more formal risk assessment? They can be one of the best ways to prevent accidents and may be a legal requirement. We would always recommend that a formal risk assessment is written even where there is no legal requirement to do so.
- If you have more than five employees, provide a written copy of your risk assessment - it's a legal requirement.
- Are your farm safety protocols and risk assessments clear to all your workers? Have you used appropriate signs and considered any language barriers/potential misunderstandings?



We're happy to offer farming insurance help and guidance, so please call or email us.

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