



## On the Farm, Children are at constant risk

Over the past decade, 55 children under age 16 died in Ontario farm accidents. The deaths of these youngsters represented just under 20 percent of all farm workplace fatalities.

For every child who died, there may have been a dozen or more kids seriously injured in farm accidents, as well as countless "near misses". Studies show that children have a higher accident rate than adults when statistics are adjusted for the fact that youngsters aren't exposed to farm hazards on a full-time basis.

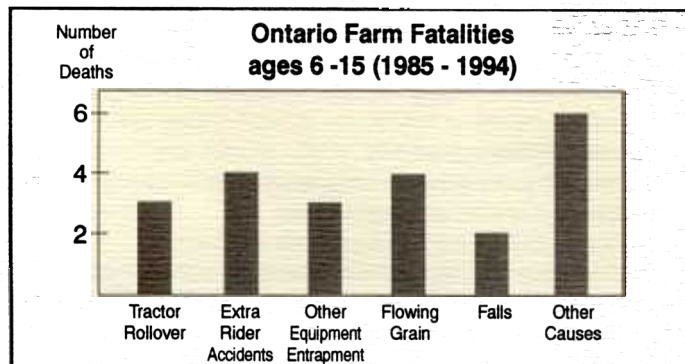
Statistics can't begin to describe the anguish and devastation of a child's death on their family. The numbers are useful to point out the major threats to life and limb of children on the farm.

### Adult supervision imperative

Of all child deaths, 60 percent involved youngsters of age five or less! Nearly two-thirds of the pre-schoolers died after being stuck by or caught up in farm equipment. Another 27 percent were run over after falling from tractors or farm equipment.

It's not easy for young farm families to maintain constant vigilance in the supervision of young children. The fact remains that the majority of the under-5 fatalities happened precisely because adults had lost track of a child's whereabouts. Young children simply have to be supervised by adults at all times.

When death is the result of falling from a tractor or piece of moving farm equipment, full responsibility lies with the adult who allowed the youngster to "come along for the ride". It doesn't matter whether the driver gave in to the child's plea, or simply wanted to keep track of the youngster. Just because dad let you ride when you were a kid, doesn't make it o.k.! Allowing riders on farm equipment is definitely a negligent, irresponsible act.



### Kids want to grow up fast

A majority of Ontario farm deaths in the 6-to-15 age group also involved farm machinery. Almost 20 percent of these victims had been "extra riders". Three young teenagers died when tractors they were operating overturned.



Major physical and psychological changes occur during the decade between 6- and 15-years-of-age. It's often hard for parents to realize just how quickly their youngsters are growing up. The need for direct supervision decreases with age. However, basic rules -- such as staying away from areas where work is in progress -- must be strictly enforced.

Most children want to take part in farm work as soon as possible. This creates the need for a new kind of adult supervision. You must determine which tasks are appropriate for a child's age. Patient training in the proper methods of performing various tasks is vital. If safety rules are broken, adults have to take as much time as is necessary for explanation and enforcement.

While a young teen may be starting to look like an adult, rest assured that their physical, mental and emotional development are not complete. Simply being able to reach the clutch does not a tractor driver make! Teenagers' lack of experience and their sense of immortality increase the inherent risks of operating equipment. Adults have to be very firm with youngsters at this stage, and be certain to set the right example!

### Understand each child's capabilities and limitations



The box on page 2 highlights developmental characteristics of children at various ages. Based on this information, suggestions for age-appropriate tasks are provided.

## Child development and age appropriate tasks

Childrens' physical and mental development follow a reasonably predictable pattern. However, each child is unique, and may or may not develop at the same rate as others of their age.

The following synopsis of child development characteristics and age appropriate tasks was derived from the work of Dr. Richard Clark of Ohio State University. He urges parents to monitor their own childrens' development, and carefully judge individual capabilities. (Parental expectations often exceed a child's developmental capabilities!)

### Preschool years

- Very rapid growth, beginning of motor skill development.
- Balance problems, clumsiness, slow reaction time.
- Can't differentiate speed, weight, force, acceleration, distance, or location accurately.
- Can't memorize rules -- attention span less than 10 minutes.
- Strong-willed -- don't stop and think before acting.
- Curiosity high -- fear lacking.

#### *Age appropriate tasks for preschoolers*

- Tasks musn't require balance, rapid motion, or machines.
- Tasks should take less than 10 minutes to complete, and must not require accuracy.
- Instructions must be demonstrated and repeated each time.
- Appropriate jobs might include "helping" with household cleanup, watering plants, feeding small animals.
- Maximum adult supervision is essential at all times, due to child's poor co-ordination, high energy, impulsiveness, and lack of fear.

### Ages 6 to 11

- Child learns to use small and large muscles during this slow, steady growth stage.
- Poor eye-hand co-ordination slowly develops with age and practice.
- Exhibits of boundless energy, followed quickly by fatigue.
- Children begin trying to master more complex tasks.
- Memory and ability to deal with issues like location, distance, weight, force, speed, and acceleration slowly develops.
- Children think they have greater physical and cognitive skill than they demonstrate. Attention span is 12 to 14 minutes.
- Must operate with concrete facts -- not yet capable of thinking about abstract ideas. Oral instructions still must be backed up with demonstrations of how to perform each task.
- Ability to sort items by similar characteristics is developing.
- Want to accompany adults, test skills, and try new tasks.
- Don't take responsibility -- follow-through to task completion is rare.

#### *Appropriate tasks for ages 6 to 11*

- Tasks should be of short duration, and should not require good eye-hand co-ordination.
- Supervision still necessary--instructions should be demonstrated.
- Tasks should not require accuracy, high quality, or total completion.

- Hand tools are appropriate -- not power tools.
- At this stage, children enjoy tasks that involve sorting of materials. Appropriate jobs might include feeding of animals (under supervision); cleanup; yard and garden work such as weeding, watering, and picking; lawn mowing with a push mower on a flat surface (after age 10, and under supervision); hand raking; and digging.

### Ages 12 to 14

- Clumsiness and co-ordination problems often accompany rapid growth.
- Children master concepts of motion and direction.
- Abstract thinking develops -- they can understand instructions without seeing the task, and can begin to apply previous work experiences to new jobs.
- Children experience feelings of immortality -- a belief that accidents happen to the "other person".
- Begin to test the limits of their physical abilities. Don't understand that physical size isn't a substitute for experience and judgement.
- Self-preoccupation can spell danger for others working with children of this age.
- Aggression, risk-taking, rebelliousness toward parents.
- Other interests may create haste to complete a job.

#### *Appropriate tasks for ages 12 to 14*

- Don't mistake size for ability!
- Potentially the most dangerous age, due to high risk-taking, ease of distraction, clumsiness, and feelings of immortality.
- Limited power tool use, under supervision -- hand tools still best.
- Begin to incorporate tasks with higher physical requirements.
- Starting with low risk tasks, begin giving more responsibility for follow-through with less supervision.

### Ages 15 to 18

- Most awkwardness overcome -- mastery of small and large muscles basically complete.
- Skills are honed through practice and experience.
- Abstract thinking allows for oral instruction, generalization of skills from one task to another, and thinking and projecting into the future.
- Feelings of immortality persist.
- Teens feel size and age can substitute for ability and experience.
- Rebelliousness, risk-taking, aggression are typical.
- Undue haste -- due to competing interests -- can result in accidents.
- May act like an adult one day, and like a child the next.

#### *Appropriate tasks for ages 15 to 18*

- Can start to take on adult jobs.
- Still need to gain experience under adult supervision (e.g. equipment operation and maintenance).
- Gradually increase tasks as experience is gained.
- Don't delegate "old" equipment to teen, and "new" machines to parents. Older equipment may have more operating problems and fewer safety features.
- Risk-taking and immortality feelings lead to pushing equipment beyond safety limits.

## Plan your own child safety strategy

As the statistics on page 1 so clearly illustrate, the major causes of farm accidents involving children are lack of supervision and inadequate training. Obviously, we could all benefit by heightening our safety awareness. Safety is something that must become a habit.

### **Take stock of safety status**

Start by conducting an in-depth safety inspection of the farming operation. By identifying and correcting hazards, you'll be taking a major step toward protecting children (and everyone else)!

Such an inspection should cover every facet of the operation. The Farm Safety Association has developed a very detailed safety audit form that is ideal for this purpose. Hazards are identified by the farmer during an inspection tour, and target dates can be established for taking corrective action.

The audit checklist covers the home, buildings, machinery, fire prevention, electrical safety, and numerous other potential hazard areas. You can boost safety awareness by involving school age children in the inspection. (Who knows -- they may spot hazards that we overlook!)

When taking stock of your farm's safety status, think about "close calls" that could have resulted in serious injury or death. Try to determine the factors responsible for the near-accident, and take steps to minimize the chance of it happening again. It may be a worthwhile exercise to discuss the incident with children who are old enough to comprehend.

Good housekeeping is very important to maintaining a safe farmstead. Many children have been injured by tripping over objects that were left lying on the ground. Other youngsters have been hurt when they became entangled in old fence wire or baler twine. Anything that is needed should be neatly stored; everything else should go to the dump or recycling centre.

When storing items, be careful not to create new hazards. For example, a couple of straw bales below a fuse box can put the danger of electrocution within a child's reach. Also, heavy objects should never be left leaning against walls or fences. Children may try to climb these items, and could fall or even pull an object over top of themselves.

Dangerous materials require special consideration. Pesticides and other toxic chemicals should be kept in locked storage, in their original containers -- that's the law in Ontario. Empty containers should be rinsed out and kept in the locked storage until disposal.

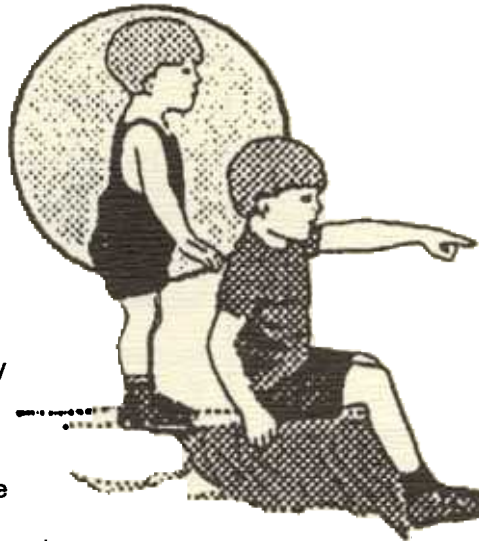
Secure storage for treated seed and fertilizer is also important. Warn children of the dangers posed by these materials, in the strongest possible terms!

### **Supervision still number one**

Small children must be supervised at all times. It's simply not enough to tell them to "stay away" from the work area. Toddlers want to be with their parents, and tend to forget what they were told when they see daddy driving up on the tractor.

Child care poses a difficult problem for many young farm families. One or both parents may hold off-farm jobs. There will be times when both mom and dad have to pitch in to make sure that field work is completed on time.

Try to anticipate when you will need a baby-sitter or day-long child care. Are there relatives or neighbours who could look after the youngsters during busy periods? Child care resources are being developed in some rural municipalities.



Under some circumstances, you may simply have to isolate preschoolers in a "safe" area. A fenced area near the house is a good idea. One dairy farmer even constructed a play room in the barn. Glass doors make it possible to keep an eye on the youngsters while doing the chores.

Even when children are confident in a safe room or yard, adult supervision is needed. Kids may find a way to get out, and can still get hurt while they are just playing.

### **Training needs grow**

Direct supervision becomes less important with older children and teens. However, parental direction remains crucial. You've got to be firm about the rules. Certain areas -- e.g. pesticide storage, large animal pens, silos and grain bins, farm machinery shed, etc. -- should be off-limits.

No one other than workers should be allowed in areas where work is being carried out. By learning this policy early, children will develop a good habit that should last a lifetime.

Training young children to carry out simple tasks requires patience and perseverance. You'll need to demonstrate the correct procedure, and will likely have to repeat instructions every time the child takes on the task.

Safety experts recommend waiting until a child is at least 10 to 12 years old before allowing them to do any significant farm work. Start them slowly, and be prepared to spend plenty of time on training and enforcement of safety rules.

The machinery operation "learning curve" could start with a small lawn tractor. Train youngsters in controlled situations where their actions can be closely observed. Watch to see how often or how easily they're distracted.

Some children can begin operating farm machinery by age 13, but only under supervision. If possible, tractors operated by youngsters should be ROPS-equipped. Let the child get the "feel" of the tractor while doing minor jobs around the farmstead. You can provide driving and safety lessons, but it would be even better to enroll the youngster in a training program offered by 4-H or other organizations.

Before a young trainee heads to the field, test them verbally to see how they would handle various crisis situations. Choose large, open fields and flat terrain for the child's first experience with tillage or other field work. Keep a close eye on their performance to see how they get along. Be prepared to stop the child to offer suggestions and explain precautions. However, don't "hover" and put too much pressure on the kid!

### ***"Walk your talk!"***

One of the most important things you can do is set a good example. All the training in the world will be of limited value if you don't practise safety in your day-to-day activities.

### ***Dress kids for safety***

Appropriate protective gear is essential for safety in the farm workplace. It is equally important to children's well-being, whether they are teens helping with farm work, or toddlers playing in the yard.

Everyone should cover up for protection against sunburn. The earlier in life that ultraviolet damage to skin occurs, the greater the potential for cancer development later.

When children start riding bikes, ATV's, etc., make it a rule that they always wear helmets.

Older children working on the farm should wear protective gear to suit the job -- e.g. safety shoes, hard hats, gloves, respiratory protection, etc.

### ***Help is available***

Check with your children's teachers to find out if farm safety courses are being covered in the curriculum. If not, take your concerns to the principal and/or the school board.

Send your kids to safety information days and farm safety daycamps when these are held in your area. 4-H farm safety clubs operate in many counties -- check with your local OMAF office or county farm safety association.

The Ontario Farm Safety Association maintains a comprehensive library of literature and videos. Check with the Guelph office to obtain a list of available material, or to borrow specific items. Family viewing of safety videos is an excellent way to heighten safety awareness.



### ***Child safety is in your hands***

Remember that children sometimes are careless, and may forget. They may try to do too much, and sometimes deliberately disobey. In the end, child safety is the responsibility of adults. No matter how carefully they are taught, children lack the experience and knowledge to make all the right choices on their own.

### **A child safety checklist**

The following list covers several of the most important threats to children's health and safety on the farm. It is by no means comprehensive, but can serve as a starting point toward making your farm a safer place. Discuss the list, point-by-point, with your children. See who can come up with additional safety hazards. This exercise will help boost overall family safety awareness.

- ✓ No riders! NO RIDERS! NO RIDERS!
- ✓ Before moving equipment (especially when backing up), make sure that children are safe.
- ✓ Don't allow children to play with idle machinery.
- ✓ Leave hydraulic equipment (such as front end loaders, 3-point implements, combine heads, etc.) in the "down position".
- ✓ When tractors and self-propelled machines are parked, brakes should be locked and keys removed from the ignition.
- ✓ Always leave a tractor PTO lever in the "neutral" position.
- ✓ Keep machinery in good repair. Pay particular attention to protective shielding, ROPS and seat belts.
- ✓ Safety training must be completed before children are allowed to operate machinery. A degree of supervision will continue to be needed until teens become experienced operators.
- ✓ Farm ponds and manure storage structures should be surrounded by child-proof fencing.
- ✓ Place fixed ladders out of reach, or fit them with a special barrier. Store portable ladders away from danger areas.
- ✓ Practise good housekeeping. Don't leave items lying around to create a tripping hazard. Heavy objects shouldn't be left leaning against walls or fences.
- ✓ Livestock facilities and operating machinery should be "off limits" to young children. Adult supervision is required at all times.
- ✓ Shield dangerous machinery components, electrical boxes, and wiring. Place out of reach of small children or fit with locking devices.
- ✓ Store pesticides and other dangerous chemicals in locked facilities.
- ✓ Place warning decals on all grain bins, silos, wagons, and trucks.
- ✓ Don't start unloading grain from wagons or bins until you have double-checked that no one is inside.
- ✓ At regular intervals, set aside time for family safety instructions.