



Toolbox Talk: Safety Around Livestock or Farm Animals



Background

Cows, horses, sheep, pigs, and dogs are common fixtures on many farms and ranches in Alberta. The hazards associated with these animals come in all shapes and sizes, as do the animals themselves. Being struck-by the animal is a common hazard and can easily occur if you're working near livestock and not focused on the task at hand. Animals will react to changes in their environment, so it is important to pay attention to animal behaviors. Some animals may perceive danger and attempt to escape or run, while other animals may become nervous or agitated and kick-out or even attack. These reactions may worsen if the animal is sick or injured or nursing her young. Even animals with a mild temperament can become dangerous under the right circumstances. But behaviors are not the only problem when it comes to animal safety. Some other hazards include being struck by or pinned against gates, tripping or slipping on uneven ground or slippery work surfaces, pinch points on gates, equipment or tools being used and handling or administering medications. Let's not forget about biosecurity concerns, and the potential for spread of disease or bacteria. There is a lot to think about. And we can agree there is a considerable level of risk when working around or handling livestock or farm animals.

Managing the Risk

Some control measures you might consider implementing on your farm or ranch include:

- Wear appropriate footwear. This might mean boots with adequate traction in mucky pens or uneven surfaces or steel toed footwear that will protect against trampling or puncture
- Wear appropriate head protection if you're at risk of a fall or strike. Helmets are a trendy accessory that have the potential to prevent serious head injuries



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- Verify equipment is in good working order. The equipment you'll need will depend on what type of task you're performing and what type of livestock or farm animal you're dealing with. Some examples of equipment we use to work with, or handle livestock or farm animals might include a livestock chute or other types of enclosures, calving jacks, feeding spears or dispensers, ropes and halters, ear tags and applicators and the list goes on. All equipment should be visually inspected before use. *If equipment is in good working condition, a malfunction resulting in an injury is less likely to occur*
- If you're handling or administering medications, read the Safety Data Sheet provided by the manufacturer or your veterinarian
- Plan and designate an escape route, make sure that the escape route isn't obstructed and that it is accessible to everyone working in the area
- Come up with a work-alone check-in system if you need to be by yourself while working around livestock or farm animals. If you must work with an animal that is known to be aggressive, use the buddy system
- Always stay aware and alert, animal behavior can change in a matter of seconds. Anticipating and reacting to animal behavior can go a long way toward preventing injuries and incidents on the farm
- Be familiar with the biosecurity concerns surrounding the animals you're dealing with and how to protect the spread of disease or bacteria. This might include donning specific PPE and removing the PPE after your contact with animals
- Build safe habits. If you put on your gloves every time you handle an animal with a lead rope, your behavior becomes a habit. The act of donning the gloves becomes less difficult and more natural over time. When the animal tries to pull away or spooks, you have eliminated the chance of a rope burn injury. You've developed a safe habit

What else can I do?

- Perform a hazard assessment on the type of animals you're working with. This will help you think critically about specific hazards and how you can deal with them. Once complete, spend time reviewing the results of the hazard assessment with those who may be affected. People affected may include your family, staff or visitors
- Training should be provided to anyone who will work around or handle livestock or farm animals. Workshops or online material on working safely around livestock or low stress cattle handling can be a helpful tool
- All animals are unique and respond to stimuli differently. Don't believe that because you've worked with one animal that responded a certain way, that the next one will
- Don't let your guard down around the quiet animals in the herd, animals are unpredictable
- Of animal related deaths on farms and ranches in Alberta, horses and cows were most often involved. The average weight of a cow is 1390lbs. The average weight of a horse is 1000lbs. The average weight of a human is 137lbs
- Ensure children working near or with livestock or farm animals understand the safety measures in place on your farm. Children should know not to walk near the hind end of large animals, to behave calmly and carefully around animals and to avoid playing in pastures or pens.