



NEWSLETTER

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Planting the Seeds of Safety: How to Implement a Formal Hazard Assessment



Chances are, you already think about the hazards on your farm and how you can minimize anything that could cause injury, illness or damage before you get to work each day. In fact, considering safety probably feels like common sense — but how do you share that proactive safety wisdom with everyone working on and visiting your farm? You start by creating a formal hazard assessment.

Sherri Marthaller and Maria Champagne, two AgSafe Alberta advisors, share insight into why it's a great idea to start a formal hazard assessment and some tips on getting started.



What is a formal hazard assessment?

“A formal hazard assessment is a tool used to gather information about job tasks and identify things that could cause injury, property damage, or create an incident,” says Sherri Marthaller. “Then, it’s about determining what solutions or controls you can put in place to reduce the risk of having an incident.”

“A formal hazard assessment is about transferring that knowledge that is already in your head and putting it down on paper.” — Sherri Marthaller

Simply, it’s a formal process of identifying farm hazards, documenting them, and brainstorming measures to put in place to reduce risks. The assessment transfers the safety knowledge that is already in your head and puts it down on paper, and there are numerous benefits to doing that.

“This helps ensure nobody gets injured, but it’s also good business,” says Marthaller. “It can be a way to avoid equipment breaking down or other interruptions that interfere with business.”



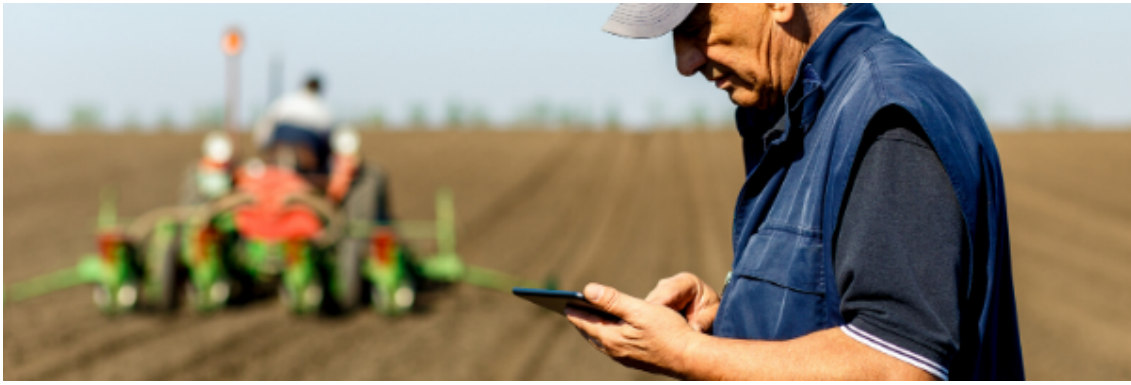
Consider the big picture

Maria Champagne understands that the idea of starting a formal hazard assessment can be daunting, which is why she recommends farmers start by considering the big picture.

“Instead of thinking of all the moving pieces on your farm and getting overwhelmed, start by identifying the biggest, most imminent hazards and then funnel down from there,” says Champagne.

Champagne and Marthaller both recommend farmers do this by thinking about work seasonally: consider the broad hazards associated with the calving season, with the harvesting season or with the seeding season, for example, rather than examining elements in minute detail.

“This form is simply another tool in a farmers’ toolbox, to help keep safety top of mind and eliminate hazards to keep all safe.” — Maria Champagne



Start with 5 to 10 hazard assessments

Marthaller adds that when farmers consider the big picture and approach a formal hazard assessment by thinking about seasonal hazards, it's a good idea to start with only 5 to 10 assessments to keep things manageable.

"If you only look at a few hazards within a season, the formal assessment and documentation process is easier to digest," says Marthaller. "Remember that there's no need to overcomplicate it — there are probably a handful of higher-risk hazards in any operation that are very similar and can be grouped in the assessment."

Marthaller recommends grouping operating farm equipment as a single hazard assessment, rather than getting bogged down in the details by examining each piece of machinery in detail. Exposure to chemicals is another other high-level example when starting a formal hazard assessment.



Communicate, communicate, communicate

Once hazards are identified and formally documented, gather your team to brainstorm controls to mitigate the risks. Champagne says the implemented controls might be engineered (like the installation of gates), administrative (such as by labeling chemicals) or personal protective equipment (for example, by wearing goggles while spraying pesticide).

"While a good hazard assessment program is led by management, all are responsible for safety." — Maria Champagne

Getting everyone involved and talking about hazards is not only to bring safety to the

forefront on the farm, it's also a way to put everyone's ideas on the table — and sometimes that means hearing about safety concerns and controls you might not have otherwise thought about.

“Communicating about this formal process is about pooling thoughts for an effective and safe outcome, and creating a stronger safety culture across the farm,” says Champagne. Good communication also leads to effective safety training on a farm, helping new hires and visitors stay safe.

Just get started!

It might seem like a lot of work at first, but once you begin the work, it's easy to see the value, says Marthaller. Having something formal in place to work from makes maintaining safety protocols, implementing updated safety measures, and knowledge transfer and training that much easier.

Formal hazard assessments are an additional tool for your farm's safety toolbox, and once the documentation process has begun, farm safety will be elevated for all going forward.

Start assessing!

Ready to start a formal hazard assessment? Download the AgSafe Alberta Farm Formal Hazard Assessment Form from agsafeab.ca.

Remember: this template is just a guide to make things easy as you begin. You can adapt, customize and add more details to best fit your farm's operations.





Stop-n-think

According to Sherri Marthaller, incorporating safe farm practices is a habit. Any time you do something with a higher risk, you want to train yourself to “stop-n-think” before acting!



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