

Use care when working with ladders

By Mike Klimenko
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Did you know that falls are the most common accidents in agriculture? These include falls from ladders, roofs or a piece of machinery. And in most instances, these are preventable occurrences.

The best way to protect against unintentional falls is to stay alert. Your chances of falling are increased by haste, fatigue, emotional upset, illness, alcohol or drugs. It is easy to overlook the hazards in what we look at in everyday life, so it would be a good idea to take a fresh look around your farm or ranch for potential hazards.

While most people associate ladder use with orchard operations, ladders are frequently used for other tasks as well – working around the shop or roof repair work to cite two examples. Because of the potential danger that comes with using ladders, an occasional review of safety procedures is important. Before you use a ladder, you should check first to be sure rails and rungs are strong, properly fastened and undamaged. Be sure to keep ladder rungs free of debris because dirt, mud and oil can easily build up. Follow all the manufacturer's warning stickers on your ladder and don't use a ladder if it is defective.

When you are ready to position the ladder for use, be sure to look above for power lines and all around for other obstacles. For example, don't position it so that its legs are sticking out into the road. Set the ladder on a good base of firm, even ground and keep in mind that wet and grassy areas do not provide good support.

It is very important to not climb too high. Never go above the third rung from the top of the ladder. Hold onto the ladder by the rails, not the rungs and always face the rungs of the ladder. Don't over-stretch yourself, and when leaning, keep both feet on the rung or you could lose your balance. Work smoothly, avoiding over-vigorous or jerky motions with your tools. This movement could cause the ladder to become unbalanced and topple or collapse.

One area of potential danger that is often overlooked is the roof, such as the shop roof or the barn roof. Every year there are several mishaps, including some fatalities, involving accidents in which a person either falls off a roof or falls through a weakened roof. In most of those cases, the victim had planned on being on the roof for only a few minutes to do a quick repair.

Here are some suggestions for roof work.

- Know whether a roof will support your weight before work starts.
- Ask yourself whether the repair work is necessary and whether you or your employees are the right people for the job.
- Assess the risks before the work starts and provide the necessary equipment and precautions.
- Make sure you have a properly secured ladder for getting on and off the roof safely.

Use care when working around machines

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Each year in the United States, more than 125,000 workers are caught or crushed by machines. Minor crushing accidents can cause pain, disability and the loss of a job. Major crushing accidents can even cost a life.

Caught or crushed injuries occur when body parts get caught between two objects or entangled with machinery. These hazards are also referred to as “pinch points.”

There are some things workers can do to lessen their chance of experiencing crushing injuries. The first, and most important thing, is for workers to know when they are placing themselves or any of their body parts in a situation of possible injury.

Machinery can pose a hazard with moving parts, conveyors, rollers and rotating shafts. Workers must always be aware of where they are in relation to moving equipment around them. Never reach into a moving machine.

Properly maintain and always use the machine and tool guards provided with your equipment; they act as barriers between the moving parts and your body. Don't reach around, under or through a guard and always report missing or broken barriers to your supervisor. Turn equipment off and use lockout/tagout procedures before adjusting, clearing a jam, repairing, or servicing a machine.

Dress appropriately for work with pants and sleeves that are not too long or too loose. Shirts should be fitted or tucked in. Avoid wearing loose and dangling jewelry. Tie back long hair and tuck braids and ponytails behind you or into your clothing. Wear the appropriate, well-fitting gloves for your job. Give your work your full attention. Don't joke around, daydream, or try to multi-task on the job – most accidents occur when workers are distracted.

Remember that caught/crush hazards are not limited to machinery. Vehicles, powered doors, and forklifts can pose a crush hazard unless they have been blocked or tagged out. Never place your body under or between powered equipment unless it is de-energized. Doors, file drawers, and heavy crates can pinch fingers and toes. Take care where you place your fingers. Test the weight before lifting, carrying, and placing boxes; an awkward or heavy load can slip and pinch your hands or feet. Get help or use tools to move large and/or heavy items.

It is also important to stay out from under any load to avoid the possibility of being crushed from above. If a load is in the air, it poses a dangerous hazard.

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