



Safety Up – At Harvest

Harvest is hectic. Racing daylight and rain clouds can be seriously stressful. Time means money when yields are at risk. As a result, harvest is the peak season for agriculture-related injuries and fatalities.

When you're in a rush, it's tempting to bypass simple safety procedures that might slow you down. But taking the extra time can be a lifesaver. So ease up. Take responsibility for your own safety. Get trained for each new task before you get started. Be alert for hazards and figure out how to manage them – remove any unnecessary risks ahead of time, and learn to manage the risks that can't be removed. **Know the job. Know the hazards. Know the drill.**

Cover your . . .

Know the job. Combines and balers can be extremely dangerous. Knowledge is your best defence. Prepare for the harvest season by getting properly trained for each task you will perform.

Get the equipment ready. The majority of severe farm tragedies involve machinery. Make sure yours is in good working condition. Be sure pre-season maintenance and repairs are handled several weeks before harvest. Also make sure *you* are in good condition. You take pride in your ability to work long and hard. You're happy to burn the midnight oil in pursuit of a goal – in this case, a successful harvest.

The reality is that fatigue, drowsiness and illness contribute to field mishaps. To ensure you'll be around to see the last of the grain go into the bin, get plenty of sleep. Take regular breaks. Wear comfortable, close-fitting clothing and sturdy, protective shoes. When you do field work, always let someone know where you are and check in regularly.

Big, mean harvesting machines

Know the hazards. Harvesting equipment is designed to cut, pull and separate things, and it does so very effectively. Unfortunately, it won't discriminate between you and the crop. Get caught in its clutches and you could be tangled, wrapped, pulled, run over, cut up or worse. Learn about the dangers ahead of time so you can avoid them while you're in the field. When you're working, slow down and think about the potential hazards of each new task before you begin.

Little person alert

Keep children safely away from farm machinery, including grain transportation equipment. Tragedies occur far too easily when children end up in the path of equipment from which the operator's view is restricted.

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Avoid harvesting hazards

Know the drill. Knowing how to identify hazards is only the first step. Once you identify them, you have to learn to manage them safely or avoid them altogether. Stop and think about possible hazards while you're operating the equipment. Be alert. Ask questions. Here are a few serious harvesting hazards to avoid.

1. **Avoid entanglement.** Every combine or baler gets a plugged intake area occasionally. This area is also known as a pull-in point, and it can grab you in an instant. To avoid entanglement:

- Operate the equipment with care and attention.
- Ensure all protective guards and shields are securely in place.
- Clear plugged equipment only after the power is turned off and the key is in your pocket.
- Don't overestimate your ability to react – entanglement injuries happen very quickly.
- Decrease the incidence of plugged machines through regular maintenance, late-season weed control, and by operating during optimal conditions.
- In wet field conditions, wait a few hours or an extra day, if possible, to reduce plugging.
- If you must harvest in marginal conditions, expect crops to plug the equipment and allow extra time to unplug it.

2. **Don't slip up.** Most people recognize the entanglement hazard. Few realize that many more injuries are related to slips and falls around farm machines. During an average workday, you might have to mount and dismount from the combine dozens of times. The top of an average combine is 12 to 14 feet high. The operator's platform is usually 6 to 8 feet high. Falls from these heights can cause serious injuries. If you are fatigued or careless, the likelihood of a fall dramatically increases.

Then there's the slip factor. Ladders and platforms are often painted metal. They're slippery in normal conditions – treacherous when wet, muddy, icy or coated in crop residue.

To prevent painful falls:

- Keep platforms free of tools or other objects.
- Clean ladders, steps and platforms regularly.
- Wear well-fitting, comfortable shoes with non-

slip soles.

- Use the grab bars when mounting or dismounting.
- Find a stable position from which to refuel or perform maintenance.
- Use three points of contact when getting in or out of machinery – one hand/two feet or two hands/one foot.
- Don't underestimate the impact of fatigue, stress, drugs, alcohol, or age on your stability.

The last word

Harvest is a productive time. The pressure may be exhilarating, but it also creates serious stress. This can only mean one thing: an increased risk of injury. To prevent injury and reap the benefits of the harvest you're working so hard at, take responsibility for your own safety. Injuries happen when you take shortcuts in performing routine tasks, work while mentally or physically fatigued, or fail to follow safety guidelines. Slow down and follow safe practices. **Know the job. Know the hazards. Know the drill.**

References

Harvest Safety, Farm Safety 4 Just Kids, Earlham, IA, <http://www.fs4jk.org>

Harvest Safety, Farm Bureau Safety Program, GA, <http://www.gfb.org/safety/harvest.htm>

Harvest Safety Yields Big Dividends, Mark Hanna, Charles V. Schwab, Laura Miller, Iowa State University Extension, National Ag Safety Database, <http://origin.cdc.gov/nasd/index.html>

Farm Safety Association, Ontario.

How quick are you?

At 1000 RPM, a PTO shaft will entangle at 4 metres per second. An average measured reaction time on an adult male is about .2 seconds. So by the time you react to the pull of the PTO, it has already pulled you or your clothing almost a metre. Guards anyone?