

Emergency Preparedness for Farmworkers

Farms, like most workplaces, face unexpected emergencies and disasters, which can be natural or man-made.

To help lessen the impact of these events, employers and supervisors should develop and exercise emergency action plans (EAPs), which prepare workers for emergencies and disasters before they occur.

WHAT IS AN EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN?

An EAP identifies and organizes employer and worker responsibilities in preparation for and when responding to a workplace emergency or disaster. Having a plan with the employer's support and commitment and workers' participation is key to an orderly evacuation and quick response. Developing and implementing an EAP can lessen confusion, decrease injuries and limit destruction of property during and after a disaster or other emergency.

AGRICULTURAL EMERGENCIES

Agricultural emergencies can generally be grouped into two categories, natural and man-made, with several different types of incidents falling into each category.

The employer should make workers aware of the potential man-made and natural workplace emergency situations that could have an impact on the farm. Natural and man-made disasters may include many of the following:

Natural:

- Tornadoes
- Hurricanes
- Wildfires
- Floods
- Severe winter storms
- Severe dust storms
- Lightning strikes

Man-made:

- Wildfires
- Earthquakes

- Chemical releases or spills
- Explosions or fires
- Animal handling incidents
- Grain entrapments
- Power failures
- Rotating and moving equipment incidents (e.g., power take-off shafts, screw conveyors/augers)
- Amputations
- Vehicle incidents (e.g., turnovers, rollovers)
- Workplace violence
- Accidental poisoning

Developing and implementing an EAP can lessen confusion, decrease injuries and limit destruction of property during and after a disaster or other emergency.

HOW TO PREPARE AN EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN

A well-documented EAP should ensure that emergency response procedures are established for the period of time before, during and after an emergency. The plan should be broad enough to address all types of emergencies or disasters that could possibly occur on the farm.

For smaller organizations, the EAP does not need to be written and may be communicated orally. Nevertheless, it is always good to have a written EAP. The best EAPs are customized for your specific farm operations and require time, thought and planning.

Include workers and family members in the emergency preparedness planning process to help identify emergency or disaster situations that can impact the farm. The EAP should be revised once shortcomings have become known, and the plan should be reviewed at least annually. The employer should review the EAP with each worker when the following occurs:

- A new worker is hired
- The plan is developed
- The worker's workplace responsibilities or designated actions under the plan change

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

At a minimum, the EAP should include the following:

- Emergency escape procedures and routes
- Procedures to account for workers
- Procedures for workers who remain on-site after the alarm sounds
- Duties for workers designated to perform rescue and medical functions
- The preferred means for reporting emergencies
- Contact(s) for further information or explanation of duties under the plan
- Possible emergency events, incidents and life-threatening situations
- Emergency escape routes, shelter-in-place locations and rally points
- Floor plans and workplace maps
- A chain of command to prevent confusion and to coordinate work
- Emergency communication equipment, such as two-way radios or a public address system for notifying workers and first responders
- Special equipment needed for emergencies and disaster response
- Workers' emergency phone numbers and contacts
- Farm inventory that includes the location of livestock, electrical shut-off locations, buildings and structures, and farm machinery/equipment makes and model numbers
- Needed supplies, such as sandbags, fire extinguishers, gas-powered generators and hand tools
- If needed, the location of primary and secondary

areas to relocate farm assets and workers

- The location of buildings in the vicinity that can be used as a command post or logistical assistance area

PRE-PLANNING WITH FIRST RESPONDERS

Implementing and exercising an EAP should involve working with your local first responders or fire department. Invite them to walk your farm to gather and record important information that could be critical for making life-saving decisions during an incident, such as a grain bin entrapment, fire or natural disaster. Pre-planning allows first responders to become familiar with the following:

- Farm's physical layout, including buildings and other structures (e.g., grain bins)
- Hazardous chemicals (e.g., pesticides, anhydrous ammonia) and equipment (e.g., augers)
- Locations where employees would be if an emergency occurred
- Important contacts, including daytime and nighttime contact information
- How utilities (e.g., electric, gas and water) can be controlled
- Evacuation plans and security
- Emergency first responder limitations

TRAINING

Worker training may vary from operation to operation. Some employers set up formal classroom-style training for workers, and others work one-on-one with workers. If workers are expected to perform adequately in an emergency, provisions must be made for the training of both individuals and teams.

Regardless of the training approach, worker training is an important part of a good emergency preparedness plan. Training should be conducted periodically or as needed to maintain workplace preparedness. In addition, both instruction and training materials should be provided to workers in a language that they can understand, because some workers may not speak English.

Workers should be trained in the following areas:

- Evacuation plans
- Alarm systems
- Reporting procedures for personnel
- Shutdown procedures
- Types of potential emergencies
- Farm exercises and drills

FARM EXERCISES AND DRILLS

Unless the plan is tested, it is difficult to predict all of the problems that may happen. Exercises and drills are excellent tools to minimize these potential problems. Nevertheless, exercises and drills should be conducted annually or as needed to practise all or critical portions (such as evacuation) of the EAP.

After each drill, exercise or emergency incident, a meeting or review should be held to evaluate what happened, why it happened and how it can be done better by the employer and workers in the future. Furthermore, post exercise and drill meetings or reviews will identify areas that require improvements.

MEDICAL SERVICE AND FIRST AID

At least one person, in the absence of an infirmary, clinic or hospital in near proximity to the workplace, should be adequately trained to render first aid. It is also essential that basic first-aid supplies are available. Emergency phone numbers should be posted in visible places, inside farm vehicles and on telephones.

For more information on first aid, see the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety's (CCOHS) fact sheet on first aid.

WORKPLACE EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM

A farm's most valuable asset during the first few minutes of an emergency is a well-trained and disciplined emergency response team. A farm emergency response may be provided by an outside organization, such as the fire department, or in some cases by the farm's internal emergency response team. Workers who are members of the emergency response team should be thoroughly trained and physically capable of performing emergency response duties and responsibilities. They should also be knowledgeable about the hazards found on the farm.

Team members should know when to take actions themselves and when to wait for outside assistance if an emergency or disaster is too large to handle. One or more members on the team should be trained on the following:

- How and when to use various types of fire extinguishers
- First aid, including cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)
- Shutdown procedures
- Chemical spill control procedures
- Emergency rescue procedures

CONTRACTORS

Employers should alert contractors about the hazards found in the workplace, particularly regarding the work they are to perform. In any emergency situation, contractors should be able to take appropriate action as part of the EAP.

For additional information, contact your trusted advisor at Lloyd Sadd Insurance Brokers Ltd today.

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