

New study focuses on dairy worker safety and health risks

On behalf of Johnston, Moore & Thompson posted

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All types of agricultural jobs are dangerous, and among the most risky is dairy work. The agricultural industry has the highest rate of worker injuries, occupational diseases and fatalities of any labor sector, and dairy work ranked second among all agricultural areas for injuries and fatal accidents. Studies of [workers' compensation](#) claims show that most workplace accidents at dairies involve truck or heavy equipment accidents and animal injuries.

As the dairy industry has changed and grown over the past few decades, operations have become larger and hired more workers -- which means that more farms are subject to regulation by OSHA and state worker safety agencies. Organizations that employ more than 10 people are required to ensure a safe working environment for their employees.

A paper presented at the recent national meeting of the Dairy Calf and Heifer Association highlighted the worker safety issues on dairy farms and made suggestions for dairy farm operators who want to do a better job of promoting workplace safety. The paper, presented by David Douphrate of the University of Texas and Colorado State University, pointed out that the first and most important step in preventing workplace accidents, illnesses and fatalities is to make a safety plan.

Lack of an effective safety plan among the most common OSHA citations against dairy farms

According to Douphrate, the two main causes of worker injury and death on dairy farms are accidents involving heavy machinery and animal-related injuries. The most common types of machine-related injury were tractor rollovers, being struck by or run over by tractors, and entanglement in rotating shafts. The most common animal injuries included kicks, bites, and workers becoming trapped between large animals and fixed objects.

Other common causes of dairy worker illness, injury and death include chemical exposure, "manure lagoons," improperly used or defective power tools, and lack of appropriate personal protection equipment. The injuries can range from broken bones to crush injuries and amputations -- all of which can be life altering for the worker and lead to expensive workers' compensation claims for the dairy operator.

In a review of OSHA inspections of U.S. dairy operations, some of the most common citations Douphrate found included a finding that the operations lacked very basic worker safety plans:

- Lack of any appropriate injury and illness prevention program
- Failure to record and report workplace injuries
- Inadequate handling and safety management of hazardous chemicals
- Inadequate communication to workers about chemical hazards
- Lack of appropriate respiratory protection and eye or face protection
- Inadequate guarding of farmstead equipment, floor and wall openings, and holes
- Lack of protective structures to prevent rollovers
- Inadequate first aid, fire extinguishers and medical services

An effective worker safety program includes a full evaluation of hazards and risks, along with a good communication plan so employees know how to work safely. Every small business, including agricultural businesses, needs to set up and carry through with a good plan to prevent worker injuries and illnesses, and to respond properly in the case of an accident.

Sources:

- Dairy Herd Network, "[Put employees' safety first](#)," Megan Pierce, April 7, 2011
- "Dairy Farm Safety And OSHA-Approaches for Effective Management and Worker Training," David I. Douphrate, University of Texas and Colorado State University