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PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MAKE IT CLEAR

Keep farm workshops neat and clean in order to enhance safe working conditions.

Just about every task undertaken in a farmer's workshop should be approached with specific safety precautions in mind.

However, elements as simple as the workshop configuration, keeping it clean and maintaining an up-to-date first aid kit can add to the safety of the facility and everyone working inside it.

Agricultural Safety Specialist, Cheryl A. Skjolaas, at the University of Wisconsin Center for Agricultural Safety and Health, says slips, trips and falls account for some common farm workshop mishaps.

"Make sure there's clear walking space throughout the shop and clear paths identified for work activities," Skjolaas says. "Materials and tools used for projects shouldn't be lying in walking pathways."

Scrap materials, loose parts, scattered tools and equipment or things such as oil spills all create potential for accidents. Debris should be cleared and properly disposed of as soon as possible. Oil or other liquid spills should be covered with absorbent material and promptly cleaned up.

In evaluating a shop for evidence of safety hazards, owners should look at elements overhead as well as those at eye level.

“Many times a mezzanine/balcony is added to a farm workshop,” Skjolaas says. “The stairs up to that balcony must be properly constructed and railings must be installed around the balcony perimeter to prevent falls. Toeguards, even though they may be a nuisance when equipment is moved on and off the balcony, are essential for safely working around that balcony area. It’s too easy for tools or small equipment to slide off the balcony edge and that poses a significant safety issue for anyone working below it.”

Mobile balcony railings assist in lifting equipment on or off the balcony, but are key to safely using the area.

“It’s not a bad idea to keep the area around the balcony perimeter clear of equipment or supplies,” Skjolaas says. “That enhances the safety of the balcony area.”

Skjolaas recommends evaluating how to accommodate the shop workflow by identifying the types of activities conducted inside it. Having a clear plan for both work areas and storage needs helps everyone working in the shop find necessary tools and work in a safe manner. Planning to work at tasks that require adequate ventilation or locating equipment such as welders and welding supplies as far away from flammable materials stored in the shop will greatly reduce workshop hazards.

“If a farm is under the Occupational Safety and Health Administration’s (OSHA) jurisdiction, the workshop will be inspected,” Skjolaas says. “In that case, storage of any chemicals or hazardous materials must comply with their regulations. Farmers can also voluntarily comply with OSHA Safety Data Sheet standards.”

Maintaining an annual chemical inventory and storing chemicals according to manufacturer instructions is important to maintaining safe chemical use practices. Identifying and properly disposing of chemicals or hazardous materials no longer being used enhances safe work environments.

“Often leftover paint cans or spray cans accumulate in the shop,” Skjolaas says. “Anything that’s hardened inside the container and can’t be used should be removed from the storage area and disposed of properly. All of those activities should be completed during an annual inventory.”

Each year, power tools should be evaluated to identify any tools that aren’t working properly or may be damaged. Worn electrical cords, broken casings or deteriorating plugs should all be addressed prior to using the tools.

“All the tool’s safety guards and features should be installed and be in working condition,” Skjolaas says. “Along with the inspection of the power tools, any type of equipment used in the shop should be checked each year to ensure it’s working properly.”

OSHA provides a “Hand and Power Tools” booklet that provides a detailed checklist of tool evaluation practices as well as information about related state safety programs, training and education and voluntary protection programs.

Individuals using shop tools must also have the proper protective equipment. To determine what

protective gear is necessary, farmers can evaluate what dangers specific tools pose during operation.

“Using a chisel or cutter of some type poses the hazard of having something lodge in your eye,” Skjolaas says. “While using that tool, you should wear impact resistant safety glasses. When someone welds, there’s a variety of protective gear necessary to welding safely.”

Proper shop ventilation protects shop workers from the hazards of carbon monoxide poisoning if equipment is running inside the shop. Installing a carbon monoxide detector also helps protect everyone in the shop.

“Another safety practice is making sure everyone in the shop is aware of the movement of large equipment into or out of the shop,” Skjolaas says. “It’s best to survey the area around the equipment before you start to move it. An effective communication plan can help keep everyone informed about what’s happening in the shop at any given time.”

Open doors and windows may provide adequate ventilation of smoke, fumes and exhaust gases during summer. During cold weather months, special systems may be needed to remove hazardous fumes or substances. For painting, a booth with separate venting is recommended for paint fumes.

Adequate and fully operational lighting, heating and ventilation are essential to provide safe work areas. Additional lighting over work benches and stationary tools increases safety. Heating units should provide adequate and even distribution of heat.

All electrical wiring must have adequate capacity to handle lighting, heating and power tool requirements. Electrical outlets should be conveniently located and in sufficient number to

accommodate power needs. Conductors, plugs and receptacles should be 3-wire grounded to prevent shock when using power tools.

Ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCI's) are recommended for wash bays and other damp areas. Explosions-proof wiring, motors and fixtures are required where flammable gases, fumes or vapors might be present.

“Along with a first aid kit, fire extinguishers should be readily available and capable of putting out the type of fire that could happen in the shop,” Skjolaas says. “Many fire extinguishers are sized to put out a fire in a trash can. If you have a grease fire or oil fire, that size extinguisher won't be effective.”

Workers should be trained on how to use the extinguisher and everyone working in the shop should know when it's appropriate to call 911 for assistance with a fire or shop accident. That type of contingency planning can save lives.

“Human life comes first,” Skjolaas says. “Everyone should know when it's time to exit the shop and know what area has been designated as a safe spot where everyone can meet during an emergency.”

When activities such as welding take place in the shop, it's important to check for any “hot spots” or potential for ignition of a flame. Any flammable materials should be maintained well away from areas where welding or other potentially hazardous activities take place.

Many other shop safety practices are recommended for activities such as lifting equipment or supplies, fall protection, appropriate dress and safe operation of power tools. Details on related topics can be found at https://www.osha.gov/dsg/topics/agriculturaloperations/hazards_controls.html.

