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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**CHECK IT OFF**

***Use a checklist to help identify and address safety in the farm workshop.***

The atmosphere of a family farms makes it easy to lose sight of how important it is to work safely in every area of the operation.

Will Petska, Human Resources/Safety Manager at Tractor Central, LLC in Eau Claire, WI, says one means of working safely across the farm is use of a checklist which is regularly reviewed to inspect and maintain specific work areas.

The checklist can be as simple as a bulleted list or as detailed as an Excel spreadsheet. Whatever the form, the checklist can quickly help assess safety concerns and create a plan to address them.

“The checklist is most effective if one individual is tasked with completing a specific part of the list,” Petksa says. “For example, a checklist can be used to address combustible dust issues in a grain room. A specific employee or farm family member can be assigned the duty of using the necessary tools to

remove any grain dust deposits on a regular basis. In a farm workshop, one person can be held accountable for making sure all shop exits are clear, fire extinguishers are in working condition or electrical panels haven't been hidden behind equipment or supplies."

Over a period of 15 to 20 years, a farm workshop may be crammed with equipment and tools that were gradually added over time. Because farm equipment is much larger now than in the past, workshop size can quickly become a safety issue.

"When you overfill a shop, exits can become blocked, electrical panels can be hidden behind equipment and fire extinguishers may be difficult to access. It happens gradually. Unless you're inspecting and looking for these types of issues, you may not be aware of them."

Over time, electrical panel doors may be worn or damaged and no longer close. In some cases, the door may have fallen off. If areas of the panel are punched out and there's no door covering the panel, it poses a serious electrical fire or electrocution hazard.

In a crowded or rearranged shop, electrical outlets may be inaccessible, leading to use of extension cords to run equipment. If the shop has been reconfigured, power outlets need to be updated to ensure electrical power safety.

"Electrical cords are not a permanent solution to accessing electrical power," Petska says. "They not only pose electrical and fire hazards, workers can easily trip over cords running across the floor. If you're driving over them, abrasions and wear on cords causes further safety hazards."

The same concerns are true of water hoses and air hoses.

“Hose reels for air and water hoses were pretty spendy years ago,” Petska says. “Now they’re a very economical way to address tripping and falling issues.”

Petska emphasizes that using the right tool for the job is an often overlooked safety issue.

“I often say that I think my Dad could have overhauled a tractor with the pair of pliers he carried in his back pocket,” Petska says. “However, that’s not necessarily a best practice. From a safety standpoint, it’s so important to take time to get the best tools for the job.”

A simple illustration of this guideline is the knife many farmers carry in their pocket. Because pocket knives typically become dull with use, excessive force may be necessary to accomplish a task, elevating the risk for serious injury.

“Box cutters and other types of tools made for that kind of job will do it more efficiently and in a safer manner,” Petska says.

Worn electrical cords which have deteriorated over time are common in farm workshops. Weather checking, cracked cord ends, exposed wire and exposed loose wire are common safety concerns.

Equipment that features oscillating blades or grinders should be located in an area with plenty of room for operators to move about. Nearby equipment should be well out of the way.

Operators should also be careful to make sure they’re not wearing loose clothing, which can quickly become entangled in an oscillating feature. Jewelry or hair that hasn’t been tucked behind or inside a cap can also pose an entanglement hazard.

“One other common hazard I often see in farm shops are unlabeled secondary containers,” Petska says. “Everyone should be able to quickly identify

what's stored in a bucket or can. Hazardous products should not only be in a labeled container but safety data sheets for those products should be on site and readily accessible in the event of an emergency."

With the increasing size of farm equipment, ladder safety is becoming an important safety concern. An aging ladder or one that doesn't extend to the necessary height poses numerous safety issues.

"Some farmers have purchased scissor lifts so they can work at the height they need to," Petska says.

Flammable and combustible materials should never be located near activities where sparks or welding slag could become air borne.

"Other fire hazards in a shop can be rags used to mop up oil or grease and then thrown into the garbage," Petska says "Under the right conditions, those rags can self ignite. Fire caused by self combustion is a common occurrence that results in significant damage to both shop facilities and the equipment stored there."

Aerosol containers hold flammable materials and should be stored in a cabinet designed to protect them.

"Proper cabinets for storing aerosols have specific wall thickness to make sure the cabinet will withstand temperature levels that could cause the aerosol cans to explode," Petska says. "There are also breathers on those standardized cabinets that allow heat and any exhaust to escape instead of build up and cause an explosion."

Floor conditions in a farm shop should also be regularly monitored. Investing in a floor covering or coating can extend the life of a concrete floor and reduce injuries from slipping in areas where oil spills occur.

“A concrete floor that isn’t coated or covered will absorb oil because concrete is porous,” Petska says. “When the floor cools off its pores close up, but heat will cause them to open and can push absorbed oil to the surface and create slick spots that no one’s aware of.”

Petska notes that safety concerns in a farm shop can also include safe lifting techniques, proper lighting and many other topics.

“Someone should be held accountable for different areas of the shop and regular inspections should be completed to identify safety concerns,” Petska says. “If farm managers are complacent about safety issues, that’s how other family members and employees will see safety practices, too.”