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PRESS RELEASE

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STAY ON YOUR FEET

The Three Point Rule makes all the difference.

The Three Point Rule, which applies to climbing a ladder, exiting and mounting or dismounting equipment, or in any situation with potential for slipping and/or falling, helps maintain stability and balance and greatly reduces the risk of injury for those engaged in these activities.

Identifying slipping and falling prevention principles is one of the aims of Central States Center for Agricultural Safety and Health (CS-CASH). This University of Nebraska Medical Center group (<https://www.unmc.edu/publichealth/feedyard/>) is conducting two research projects (funded by National Institutes of Occupational Safety and Health) that are designed to make a positive impact on the sustainability of cattle feedyards through increased safety and health efforts.

The points of contact can be two hands and one foot or two feet and one hand, but at least those points of contact are needed to reduce the likelihood of slipping or falling when climbing or exiting large equipment.

Becoming adept at any skill requires practice, and that's true of learning the Three Point Rule. Learning to use the Rule and recognize situations where it's critical to working safely requires focus and concentration. Practice using the Three Point Rule until it becomes a habit.

In a Three Point Rule case study a worker needed to get to the top of a grain bin. As he climbed the ladder, his hand slipped and he fell about 10 feet to the ground below. The fall resulted in a twisted ankle, bruised leg and spinal fracture. When the incident was investigated, the worker admitted he was carrying a two-way radio in one hand and not using the Three Point Rule. It was clear that this person didn't have sufficient contact with the ladder rungs to keep from falling.

To properly implement the Three Point Rule and maintain balance and stability, keep at least three points of contact. That may include both hands and one foot, one hand and both feet or both hands and both feet.

In addition to the risk ladders pose, operating a front-end loader or other large pieces of equipment puts workers at risk for a fall when getting into or exiting the equipment. The vibration from the machine and sitting for long periods of time can also add to physical limitations. When exiting large equipment, it's natural to face the way you are going. This means your back is toward the equipment. It's extremely difficult, if not impossible, to implement the Three Point Rule when facing away from equipment in this manner.

Operators generally used handholds when getting into large equipment but exit with their back to the equipment. In order to reduce the risk of falling and sustaining an injury when exiting equipment, try to face the equipment and use the Three Point Rule. It takes much more discipline to do this.

Be aware that weather conditions create situations where use of the Three Point Rule is critical. When mud, ice and/or snow are on the surface of equipment and/or the bottoms of footwear, the risk of falling is greatly increased. It is especially important in these conditions to use the Three Point Rule.

Some ladder rungs and steps provide greater slip resistance than others. However, any surface can be slippery when snow, ice or mud is present. Being aware of your surroundings provides an added layer of safety.

When tasks require transporting materials, such as tools, to the top of a ladder or stairs, consider using a tool belt or hoisting equipment to the elevated location. This allows for use of the Three Point Rule while going up a ladder or stairs. There is no way to maintain the Three Point Rule while carrying something in your hands.

In the past, you may have omitted use of the Three Point Rule while climbing ladders and equipment. However, one additional risk factor – such as the ringing of a cell phone – could be the distraction that causes you to lose balance or stability and experience a fall. If omission of the Three Point Rule has become habitual, it will take time and concentration to reverse that unsafe behavior.

Other unsafe behaviors related to climbing and exiting equipment include rushing through the task and/or omitting the use of established safety procedures. In some instances, a worker may believe it's easier or faster to bypass safety procedures. If this unsafe behavior becomes a habit, it generally leads to negative outcomes.

Multitasking is an additional risky behavior when working around ladders and/or large equipment. People often believe they can do more than one task and focus on multiple things at a time. However, research confirms that we fool ourselves with this perception.

The human brain is only capable of focusing on one thing at a time. The brain cycles back and forth on each activity, but neither gets complete attention. This is simply practicing for an incident that can lead to injury or even death.

This limitation of the brain explains why drivers who attempt to talk on their phone while driving drive slower than the traffic around them. It also explains the high rate of accident and injury related to using a phone while driving.

Equipment upgrades will help reduce the likelihood of slips and falls. Slip-resistant ladder rungs, expanded metal steps on equipment and slip-resistant soles on footwear all help improve safety in the workplace.

Fall prevention equipment, such as harnesses and restraint devices, also decrease potential for slipping and falling. Combined with safe behaviors, these upgrades can help avoid injuries from slips and falls.

Near miss incidents provide an opportunity to recognize safety hazards and take action. In addressing these types of incidents, examine both unsafe behaviors and any equipment and/or procedures that increase the risk of slips and falls.

Anyone can experience a day when they are distracted by something. Ill health, problems at home or other factors may cause detract from a focus on tasks. In this instance, it's advisable to implement a policy that allows co-workers and supervisors to express their concern to the distracted worker and assist them in regaining focus.

Anytime you see a co-worker engaging in unsafe behavior, it's important to bring it to their attention. If you are the one who's distracted, be appreciative of their concern for your safety and take time to determine what needs to happen to resolve the distraction. If your situation seems unmanageable, seek help.

Working safely includes taking time to learn about safe work practices and seek ways to change any unsafe behaviors. Bad work habits generally lead to negative outcomes.

Source: Safety Made Simple: Safety Training for the Agriculture Industry

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