

MAKE IT A HABIT - GRAB IT

Personal protective equipment a 'must' for young people doing farm work



Just like buckling a seatbelt before driving, reaching for personal protective equipment must be automatic prior to farm work.

Hazards exist in the farm workplace in many different forms: sharp edges, dust, chemicals, noise and many more. If it is not possible to eliminate the hazard with engineering solutions, such as with a seat belt, or to minimize it with modified work practices, such as throwing out broken tools or avoiding the area, then we must rely on personal protective equipment (PPE) such as gloves, safety shoes, safety glasses, protective hearing devices (earplugs, muffs) and respirators.

Expect - don't suggest

"It's up to us as parents, grandparents and supervisors to make sure young people are trained in the proper use of PPE and that it is used every time potential hazards are present," said Dr. Barbara Lee, Director of the National Children's Center for Rural and

Agricultural Health and Safety in Marshfield, Wis. "Decisions about protecting your hearing, eyesight and skin can have lifelong impacts, good or bad."

Some exposures are cumulative. For example, each exposure to loud noise increases the risk of hearing loss, and nothing can restore hearing loss once the damage is done. Other hazards are acute, causing damage immediately, such as chemical splashes to the eyes.

Two great resources

The importance of appropriate PPE is prominent in two resources related to youth working in agriculture: the Agricultural Youth Work Guidelines (AYWG) and the Safety Guidelines for Hired Adolescent Farm Workers. Both sets of work guidelines contain posters for specific tasks that include information about relevant PPE. These resources are accessible through the Cultivate Safety website.

Protection tips

Personal protective equipment not only helps protect people but also improves productivity and profits. Farmers can share in these benefits by using the appropriate protective equipment themselves (role modeling is a powerful motivator), and providing it to family members and employees. The National Safety Council's Agricultural Division offers these protection tips:

- Use a sun safety hat (one with a wide brim and neck protection) to assist in the prevention of skin cancer.
- Protect your vision with appropriate safety eyewear (safety glasses, goggles, face-shields) when applying pesticides, fertilizers, working in the shop, or in heavy dust conditions.
- Protect your hearing with acoustic earmuffs or ear plugs when operating noisy equipment.
- Protect your lungs with the correct respiratory equipment (dust masks, cartridge respirators, gas masks, air pacts) when working in dusty or moldy conditions, spray painting, applying chemicals, working in bins, tanks, silos, and manure storage places.
- Protect your hands from abuse with job-matched gloves and barrier creams.
- Protect your feet with safety shoes or boots with non-slip soles and heels.
- Protect your skin with impervious garments when using toxic or irritating chemicals. In addition, use sunscreen to protect against the sun's harmful rays.

