

PPE only works if you use it!

by Theresa Whalen

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“*PPE only works if you use it!*” is this year’s Canadian agricultural safety campaign theme with a focus on the use, fit and access of personal protective equipment (PPE) in agriculture. The yearlong campaign was launched last March with Canadian Agricultural Safety Week.

PPE includes eye and face protection, hearing protection, protective clothing, protective creams and lotions, and respiratory protective devices.

“There are countless hazards in agriculture and that is why personal protective equipment is such an important part of every farm’s safety program,” explains Marcel Hacault, Executive Director of the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association (CASA). “All producers are strongly encouraged to get the PPE they need for their business and ensure everyone is properly trained to use it. Then keep it near where it is most likely to be needed. Our message is simple: PPE only works if you use it.”

Occupational health hazards on farms can be classified into four categories: 1) chemical – dusts, fumes, gases, etc.; 2) physical – noise, vibration, hot/cold, etc.; 3) biological – bacteria, viruses, parasites, etc.; and, 4) ergonomics – repetitive motion, heavy lifting, overexertion, etc.

The first line of defence is identifying and eliminating hazards. Once a hazard is identified Hacault says there are several things producers can do to correct it such as: redesign the set-up; use less dangerous materials; change the work process or practices; change the equipment; and establish administrative controls or safety rules for workers. When all else fails to eliminate the hazard that’s when personal protective equipment is used to reduce the hazard to acceptable levels.

An acceptable level of hazard is different for each person. Among other things, it will depend on their training, work experience, and physical capabilities. That’s why it is so important to ensure that workers are properly trained to do their job and that the training is documented.

However Hacault reminds producers that PPE is “the last line of defence for safety.” The main drawback of personal protective equipment is that it does nothing to reduce or eliminate the actual hazard. Therefore, its failure, lack of use or improper use results in immediate exposure.

Once the need for personal protective equipment has been identified, two factors must be considered: 1) the degree of protection that a particular piece of PPE provides and 2) the ease with which it can be used. Protective equipment that does not fit well or is uncomfortable may not be used, rendering it useless in controlling the hazard for which it was purchased. *PPE only works if you use!*

More information on farm safety is available at www.casa-acsa.ca or www.cfa-fca.ca .

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