Agriculture: General Housekeeping in the Workplace



Safety Talk

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Housekeeping programs are an important element to running a safe and accident-free workplace. If a good plan is set in place, the possibility of slips, fall, fires, or other dangers can be avoided, and work can be done effectively, clearing a safe place for storage and an unobstructed path for movement.

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

If you and your workers do not incorporate and follow a plan to eliminate the hidden hazards, the results could range from minor accidents to disastrous consequences that no one would see coming. The possibilities are many: hay chutes without proper guards or cages could cause falls, neglecting to inspect or repair tools could put your worker at risk of injury, if flammable materials aren't stored properly, you risk the possibility of a fire or an explosion in the workplace, which puts you and your workers at extremely high risk.

EXAMPLE

Due to a lack of inspection and reparation, a worker was running a belt conveyor at an onion farm. They had been shut down for a few days due to power outages in the area. The guard to the conveyor had been taken off prior to shutting down for maintenance purposes and the worker neglected to replace it. When the plant reopened, the team did not conduct a general housekeeping procedure to ensure all systems were ready and safe. The worker was eager to start and told himself he would reattach the guard when his shift was through. His sleeve caught in the pulley and his arm became entangled in the machine, resulting in amputation.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Proper housekeeping is a necessary procedure that must be practiced in every farm. It's a duty that is not only the owner's responsibility, but a collective effort of the owner and his workers. Frequent inspections must be conducted, and worker training on their responsibility to keep a watchful eye, report suspicious conditions and follow warning signs is essential to running a safe and accident-free workplace. The following is a list of things that are important to incorporate in your housekeeping program:

Floors and Other Areas

- Floors should be clean, in good condition and free of debris. Entranceways and areas that cannot be continuously cleaned should have anti-slip flooring.
- Trap doors, cages and railings should be in place and in good condition in areas where fall incidents may occur.
- Maintain overgrowth around buildings to prevent tripping.

Maintain Light Fixtures

- Change bulbs often and keep clean to ensure adequate light in every work area.
- Explosion proof fixtures should be installed in areas containing combustible materials.
- Maintain even lighting to prevent shadows, which could inflict fear and tension in animals, putting them and your workers at risk.

Aisles and Stairways

- Remove objects that obstruct movement and cause tripping hazards.
- Ensure aisles and stairways are clearly marked.
- Aisles should be wide enough to allow people and vehicles a clear passage.
- Blind corners can be marked with signage and fixed with mirrors to allow optimal awareness.

Spill Control

- Stop spills before they start with well maintained machines and equipment and placing drip pans and guards where spills could potentially happen.
- Clean spills with an absorbent material following the procedures in the Material Safety Data Sheet and dispose of the clean-up material safely.

Tools and Equipment

- Ensure tools are kept in their designated area. After use, put them away immediately.
- Tools should be inspected and cleaned frequently. Any tool that requires repair should be tended to or taken out of service if they are beyond repair.

Maintenance

- Perform the inspection and maintenance of tools, equipment, and machines regularly.
- This also includes the maintenance of sanitary facilities, regularly painting and cleaning walls, maintaining windows, damaged doors, defective plumbing, and broken surfaces.

Waste Disposal

- Disposing of waste immediately in designated areas is important.
- Sort and grade scrap accordingly as you work to prevent a buildup in the work area.

Storage

- The storage of containers and bins should be stacked neatly on a solid foundation and cross-tied to secure them.
- They should have at least one metre (approximately 3 feet) of clearance from sprinkler heads.

- Keep stored materials out of aisles, stairs, exits, fire equipment and emergency stations.
- Ensure storage areas are visibly marked.

Fire Prevention

- Ensure that all combustible, flammable, toxic and other hazardous materials are kept in containers that are approved and appropriate for the material they contain.
- When using flammable material, take only as much as is needed for the job and keep in safety cans while using.
- Do not leave greasy rags laying around. keep them in metal containers and be sure to dispose of them regularly.

FINAL WORD

Make general housekeeping a regular practice. There are countless hidden dangers that everyone should be made aware of. Education and enforcing scheduled inspections, maintenance and conscientious workers will prevent the unexpected injuries that occur when housekeeping is neglected.