



Equine Guelph's Training Prioritizes Safety for Horse Handlers and First Responders

Byline: Erin Kelly for the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association

From dairy operations and beef cattle ranching to pig and sheep farming, livestock is integral to many farms across the country.

But though livestock handling is a routine activity on many farms, it also carries significant risks.

According to the latest Canadian Agricultural Injury Reporting data, incidents involving animals are one of the leading causes of non-machine-related agricultural fatalities. And of the 32 animal-related agricultural fatalities that occurred between 2011 and 2020, the majority (53 per cent) involved a horse.

While some farm animals, like horses, may not be viewed as aggressive, they have the size and strength to cause serious injury, making it essential to keep safety top of mind when handling them. That's exactly what Equine Guelph aims to convey in its education, training and research focused on the health and well-being of horses and the safety of those who care for them.

"Horses, if handled well, are not typically aggressive animals, but they are very large. And even people with plenty of experience with horses can easily be injured by them, which is why safety and situational awareness must always be a priority," explains Susan Raymond, communications and education program officer at Equine Guelph.

One of the key messages that Equine Guelph, which opened in 2003 at the University of Guelph in southern Ontario, emphasizes in its training courses – which are predominantly online and available to anyone with an interest in horses regardless of the location – is that understanding horse behaviour is fundamental to safety.

"It's so important with any animal, including horses, that whoever is handling them has a good understanding of knowing how they behave in both a stressed and non-stressed situation in order to keep yourself and the animal the safe," says Raymond.

"All animals use behavioural cues, so it's our job if we're going to be working with horses to know how to read those cues and then also be aware what kind of effect our own energy, emotions and behaviour will have on the horse we're handling."

Those behaviour cues include knowing how a horse will respond to change. Though domestic horses tend to become creatures of habit when they have a regular routine, Raymond explains that, as prey and herd animals, they are highly sensitive to change,



can use the equipment they have to achieve the best possible outcomes for both animals and people involved.

“We find that a lot of responders don’t get this type of training in terms of dealing with animal emergencies,” explains Raymond. “With fire departments, for example, they may be called to a barn fire or other emergency but it’s possible that there are some firefighters who have never handled a horse or a cow before. So, we want to bridge that gap and give them basic training on what to do in those emergency situations.”

As Raymond points out, whether someone is an avid rider, a novice just starting with horse handling or a first responder wanting to be prepared for a potential emergency involving large animals, it’s never too early or too late to learn something new about safety around horses.

“We always stress that it’s important to be prepared ahead of time as much as possible, and training can help with that,” says Raymond. “You’re never too young or too old to learn about safety.”

Information about Equine Guelph’s courses can be found at equineguelph.ca.

About Canadian Agricultural Safety Week

Every year, the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association raises awareness about the importance of farm safety with the Canadian Agricultural Safety Week (CASW) campaign, which occurs during the third week of March. In 2026, CASW takes place March 15-21 and is sponsored by Syngenta Canada, CN, and Parrish & Heimbecker. More information is available at agsafetyweek.ca.

About the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association

The Canadian Agricultural Safety Association (CASA) is a national, non-profit organization dedicated to improving the health and safety of farmers, their families and agricultural workers. CASA is funded in part by the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership. For more information, visit www.casa-acsa.ca.

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Image:

[Equine Guelph – Barbara Sheridan](#) (photo credit: Barbara Sheridan)

Cutline:

Included among Equine Guelph’s online training courses is emergency preparedness for horses, as barn fires are a key safety concern for people and animals alike. Equine Guelph

