

Don't Lose Sight of Safety When Working Alone This Harvest Season

Byline: Canadian Agricultural Safety Association

Harvest season is rolling in across the country, bringing with it long days in the field. And for many Canadian farmers it also means a lot of time spent alone.

However, while working alone may be part of the job for many farmers, it also comes with risks, as it can significantly increase the likelihood of injury and is a significant cause of stress in farming. In fact, it's estimated that [50 per cent of farm accidents in Canada](#) occur when the victim is working alone.

And with many family farms across the country being owner-operated without employees, there is no shortage of time spent working alone for many farmers.

The latest [Canadian Agricultural Injury Reporting data](#) indicates that between 1990 and 2020, there were 2,814 agriculture-related fatalities in Canada, an average of 91 deaths each year. The data also found that the majority of victims of agriculture-related injuries were farm owners/operators, with the most common locations for fatal injuries being fields and dry ditches.

It's important to remember that an injury or sudden illness when working alone can quickly become a life-threatening emergency if there is a delay in getting help. While working alone is a fact of life for many farmers and farm workers, there are ways to make it safer so that everyone gets home safely at the end of the day.

Is it Safe to Work Alone?

Whether a task is safe for working alone depends on the location, type of work, and ability to receive assistance in an emergency. It's important to carefully assess each situation and the potential risks beforehand to determine if it's safe to work alone.

However, there are certain times when working alone is never a good idea, such as working in a confined space, under vehicles, tasks involving heights, and close to livestock.

If it's not safe to work alone on a particular task, wait until someone else is present and can assist. Saving a bit of time should never outweigh staying safe.

Tips for Working Alone Safely

Work-alone plan: Before working alone in a remote location, having a plan to let people know where you are and what will happen if you can't be reached can make all the difference in receiving help in a timely manner. Have a designated person to check-in with and who can go out to help you if something goes wrong. Create a check-in schedule (such as a phone call every hour), regardless of the type of work being done. When checking in, always let the person know where you are working.

Communication methods: A check-in schedule is only useful if there is a reliable way to communicate with others. Ensure your cell phone is fully charged before heading out and keep it with you at all times. Leaving your phone in the tractor won't do you much good if something goes wrong in the field and you can't access it. If you'll be in an area with unreliable cell service, use an alternative method of communication, such as a two-way radio or automated warning/duress device.

Safe work procedures: Having written safe work procedures for any job, particularly those involving hazardous tasks, is essential. Break down tasks that will be worked on while alone, assessing the associated risks and how to perform the work safely. If workers will be alone, review the hazards with them ahead of time, even if it's a job they have done before.

Inspect machinery: Before heading out to work alone, inspect and test any equipment and machinery to ensure it's in good working condition. Always follow the maintenance schedules outlined in a manufacturer's manual.

Emergency supplies: Ensure that you know the location of a first aid kit and other emergency supplies before working alone.

Training: If you have employees, make sure they have any necessary training, such as emergency first aid, before working alone. Sending out someone who is ill-prepared or has limited experience to work alone in a field is a surefire recipe for something to go wrong. Ensure that only workers with sufficient experience work alone and that they are comfortable doing so.

Take breaks and socialize: Working alone may be a requirement on many farms, but it can lead to mental and physical fatigue that can heighten the risk of incidents. Taking periodic breaks and socializing with others can help improve your mental focus, so be sure to take some time to have a walk and join others for lunch and breaks.

While working alone is often unavoidable in farming, some preparation and planning can help ensure that doing so is safe and productive this harvest season.

For more information and resources on how to stay safe this harvest season, visit casa-acsa.ca/BeGrainSafe-Week.

About the BeGrainSafe Program

The BeGrainSafe program is a grain safety initiative of the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association. In 2025, BeGrainSafe Week takes place August 11-17 and is presented by Corteva Agriscience. The program is also supported by G3, CN, Farm Credit Canada, Agriculture Financial Services Corporation, Alberta Canola Producers Commission, Alberta Grains, Canadian Canola Growers Association, Nutrien Ag Solutions, SaskOilseeds, Sask Wheat, Viterra, Grain Farmers of Ontario, Manitoba Canola Growers Association, and Prairie Oat Growers Association. For more information about BeGrainSafe, visit www.casa-acsa.ca/BeGrainSafe.

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.