Dairy Operation Safety



INTRODUCTION

California is a major supplier of milk products in the nation’s dairy industry. With the growing demand for the production of milk products—those involved in dairy operations want to ensure that workers remain safe and healthy while performing their job functions.

Dairy operations can generally be described as a ranch where milk-producing animals are raised in facilities to extract milk to be processed for human consumption. In order for workers to safeguard their well-being in dairy operation activities, they must be aware of the risks they could encounter and know how to avoid dangerous situations and unhealthy exposures.

If you work in a dairy operation, make sure you have been instructed in the recommended personal protective equipment (PPE) and trained on safe work practices for the animals, equipment, and chemicals with which you will be working. Also, make sure you have first-aid and hazardous/ confined space training so you know how to correctly and safely respond to emergencies.

The most common hazards in dairy operations involve contact with:

- Animals
- Objects
- Equipment
- Overexertion
- Strains
- Slips and falls

CONTACT WITH ANIMALS

Understand Animal Behavior

When working around or with animals, it’s important to understand their instinctive behavior.

- Animals can be unpredictable.
- Animals can be easily startled.
- Animals are disturbed by loud noises.
- An injury or illness can cause an animal to be aggressive.

- During the first milking (lactation) an animal may be uneasy and skittish.
- Know what causes animals to react violently such as, separating cows from the bull, protective cows with newborns, and cows in pain.
- When disturbed, cows and bulls can move quickly with lots of momentum and weight.

FOLLOW PROPER ANIMAL HANDLING TECHNIQUES

Animal handling is key to avoiding injuries. Workers should follow proper animal handling techniques.

- Treat each animal individually; consider its temperament, habits, and behavior in or out of the pen, and when being moved from place to place.
- Stay within the animal's view and out of its blind spot where you could be kicked.
- Maintain a "safety cushion" of space between you and an animal.
- Approach cows from the front to avoid a kick.
- Announce your approach by touching the animal's front or side and talk in a calm voice.
- Position yourself so that you cannot be trapped between passing animals and a fence or gate.
- Keep your head and hands out of the area between the animal and the stall.
- Wear sturdy work gloves when handling animals, but take them off around moving machinery.
- Don't lay your fingers or hands on milk pit curbs where they could be stepped on or kicked.
- Watch your hands when reaching into stalls to apply dip or attach milking units.
- When in the vicinity of an animal, leave yourself an emergency escape route or "flight zone" to protected alcoves in corrals and fences.

PREVENT DISEASE TRANSMISSION

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- You can develop respiratory problems from breathing urine and feces soaked dust, so keep the yard and dairy floor clean.
- Handle and store waste materials to prevent blowing debris and odor buildup.
- Use proper silage and composting so that wet and fermented feeds and grasses do not build up mold.
- Wash your hands frequently before you eat, drink, chew gum, or smoke to prevent animal-related disease transmission.

OVEREXERTION AND STRAINS

Dairy operations involve a lot of physical activity. The way to perform dairy activities without injury is to use recommended techniques and equipment and be in good physical and mental condition.

- Take good care of yourself by getting enough sleep and exercise, being properly nourished and hydrated, and avoiding drugs and alcohol.
- Only lift or move loads you can safely manage.
- Use available material handling equipment including hand trucks, dollies, rollers, conveyors, hoists, prods, and wheelbarrows.

- For manual lifts, bend at the knees and keep the load close to the body.
- Ask for assistance, if a load is too large or heavy and a mechanical aid is not available.
- Ensure the transport path is clear before moving a load.
- Bend at the knees and not the waist when attaching milking units to animals.

SLIPS, TRIPS, AND FALLS

The walking surfaces of dairy facilities are often wet and slippery from milk, water, mud, animal excrement, and various other substances. Workers can avoid a possible slip, trip, or fall incident by dressing appropriately for the situation and taking necessary precautions.

- Wear sturdy work boots to protect your feet from kicks, getting stepped on, and falling objects.
- Watch where you are walking and stepping. Walk slowly and carefully on slippery surfaces.
- Use handrails where available.
- Wash and clear walkways, milk lanes, and ladders and other climbing steps frequently.
- Report, repair or place hazard warnings on raised or cracked concrete surfaces and metal or wooden grates.
- Secure, replace, remove, report or place hazard warnings on uneven flooring and mats.
- Stay alert to floor elevation changes; keep a safe distance from floor edges.
- Never jump from one elevation to another or “hop” over a fence.

OBJECTS AND EQUIPMENT

There are a lot of machines, mechanical devices, and equipment used in dairy operations. Be aware of the danger of each type of equipment and take proper precautions.

- Use special caution around gates and fences when animals are near.
- Crowd gates and entry/gates powered by hydraulic rams, air cylinders or electric motors can close forcefully. Keep your hands, feet and body out of the closing points.
- Position yourself so that you cannot be trapped between a fence and gate pushed by passing cows.
- Keep hands and body off of gate and fence boards that cows could lean against or brush up against.
- Watch your fingers around automatic milking units; they can cause injuries if your hand is in the wrong spot.

VEHICLE SAFETY

Many dairy worker fatalities are from motor vehicle accidents.

- Take a driver safety course and ALWAYS wear your seat belt.
- Ride only in a designated seat.
- Keep off tractor fenders and hay trailers.
- Stop the trailer completely to broadcast hay or feed.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Chemicals

Chronic exposure to chemicals over the long-term can affect your health.

- Follow the use and mixing directions for cleaning and disinfecting chemicals.
- Wear chemically-resistant gloves, aprons, and other protective clothing, as needed, to protect your street cloths and skin.
- Wear safety goggles and face shields to protect against accidental splashes.
- Hot water can scald you, and when chemicals are added, hazardous air contaminants may be given off.

CONFINED SPACES

Treat enclosed manure pits and lagoons as hazardous confined spaces due to the toxic gases that can build up.

- Post hazard warning signs at all entrances.
- Properly ventilate manure pits.
- Require atmospheric testing before entry.
- Allow only qualified and protected workers to enter a manure pit for maintenance and repairs.
- When entering a manure pit, wear a full body harness with a lifeline attached to a mechanical lifting device such as a hoist and pulley.
- In some cases, a self-contained breathing apparatus must be used to enter a pit.
- Require a standby person to be in constant contact with the person in the pit.
- Rescue crews and equipment must be immediately available should an emergency arise.
- Never enter a manure pit to attempt a rescue operation without the proper training and equipment.

ADDITIONAL SAFETY TIPS

- Report and correct observed hazards.
- Provide or update worker training on potential hazards and recommended safe work practices.
- Repair defective gates, latches, and levers that could cause injury to workers and animals.
- Periodically evaluate the dairy for unsafe conditions or work procedures.