

# Dairy worker safety training

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As modern dairy operations around the world expand, farmers have become increasingly dependent on immigrant workers to milk cows, feed cows and treat cows. Hispanic laborers from Mexico, Central and South America are increasingly being utilized on larger U.S. dairies.

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Research shows that Hispanic immigrant men in the U.S., particularly those with limited English skills, work in occupations with significantly higher rates of fatal and non-fatal injuries and illnesses than U.S.-born Hispanic, non-Hispanic Black and non-Hispanic white men in 2000.

Lower education levels, illiteracy and limited English proficiency increase the possibility of injury or death associated with higher risk occupations. Safety issues related to low English literacy levels of Hispanic workers on U.S. dairy farms are a potential concern to dairy owners.

A survey of safety behaviors among U.S. dairy producers known to employ Latino workers in a single county in a Midwest U.S. state was conducted. At least two-thirds of respondents rated five of 10 safety behaviors as of moderate, high or extreme concern due to their employees' inability to read, write, speak or understand English.

Inadequate safety education and inadequate instruction are two factors directly related to safety training and can be compounded by a language barrier. Cultural, linguistic and attitude barriers should be addressed in safety trainings of foreign-born workers.

Training is one of the most important elements of any safety program. Safety training allows employees to learn their job properly, brings new ideas into the workplace, reinforces existing ideas and puts a safety program into action. Each employee needs to understand the following:

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No employee is expected to undertake a job until he/she has received instructions on how to do it properly and safely, and is authorized to perform the job.

No employees should undertake a job that appears unsafe.

No employee should use chemicals without understanding their possible health effects and without the knowledge required to work with them safely.

Mechanical safeguards must always be in place and kept in place.

Employees are to report to a superior or designated individual all unsafe conditions encountered during work.

Any work-related injury or illness suffered, however slight, must be reported to management at once.

Personal protective equipment must be used when and where required, and properly maintained.

Employees should receive safe animal-handling training



The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) mandates that if an employee does not speak or comprehend English, instruction must be provided in a language the employee can understand. Similarly, if the employee's vocabulary is limited, the training must account for that limitation.

By the same token, if employees are not literate, telling them to read training materials will not satisfy the employer's training obligation.

As a general matter, employers are expected to realize that if they customarily need to communicate work instructions or other workplace information to employees at a certain vocabulary level or in language other than English, they will also need to provide safety and health training to employees in the same manner.

OSHA compliance officers are responsible for checking and verifying that employers have provided training to employees. In addition, compliance officers must check and verify that the training was provided in a format that the workers being trained could understand.

Findings from one study suggest that task-related training that includes safety practices might improve worker safety on dairy farms. By including safety issues into task-related training, hazard recognition and avoidance practices could be presented into a context familiar to the learner.

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By having new concepts presented into the context of everyday job tasks, the learner might be able to retain the new information more effectively. The fact that workers taught by co-workers are less likely to be injured may suggest that the language and cultural mannerisms used by the instructor could possibly enhance the communication of safety information vital in the prevention of work-related injuries.

New Mexico Dairy Extension recently produced dairy safety training videos in both English and

Spanish.

**Disc One** covers the following safety topics: cow behavior and animal handling, working with locking stanchions, chemicals, milking, power takeoffs, electrical, working around bulls, heavy machinery, waste lagoons and ATVs.

**Disc Two** covers general and outside worker safety as well as milker, calf caretaker and feeder safety issues.

These videos can be used to provide orientation information to new employees, or reinforcement training to existing employees. Dairy owners can request these free videos from Dr. Robert Hagevoort at New Mexico State University.

While safety training is a vital component to an effective dairy safety-training program, dairy owners, managers and supervisors should establish clear safety expectations and provide consistent reinforcement and feedback to all employees regarding their safety performance. Owners and managers should mandate that all employees participate in safety trainings, and their attendance and participation should be documented. **PD**