

Principal's Perceptions Regarding Agricultural Safety Education Programs

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Introduction

Evidence suggests that the need exists for agricultural safety education programs. During 2001 there were 1,270 injuries for every 100,000 youth who worked or lived on a farm. In 1998 there were close to 32,800 agriculture-related injuries to children under the age of 20 who lived or worked on a farm or visited a farm. The majority of the injuries happened to children who resided on the farm (NASS, 1999). Agricultural occupations are considered to be one of the most dangerous professions. Between 1995 and 2000, there were 9.3 agricultural related deaths per every 100,000 youth. A large number of youth were killed due to machinery accidents, motor vehicle accidents, and drowning, with machinery accidents accounting for 25% of these deaths (NIOSH, 2004). Approximately 516 deaths occurred among agriculture workers between 1992 and 2005. Tractor overturns were the cause of 101 of these deaths. Daily, 243 workers suffered from an agricultural injury, and approximately 5% of the injuries were permanent (NIOSH, 2007). According to Hard and Myers (2006), males account for 96% of agricultural fatalities, and adolescents at age 15 rank the highest among youth killed on a farm.

Methods

This is a descriptive study related to secondary school principals' perceptions regarding agricultural safety programs. The population consisted of principals in Northeast Texas (N=134). A web-based questionnaire was designed using procedures recommended by Dillman (2007). Data were collected in accordance with procedures acceptable to the Texas A&M University-Commerce Institutional Review Board for Protection of Human Subjects with a total of 53 respondents for a response rate of 39.5%.

The following research objectives were used to guide the study and provide a framework for data analysis and discussion.

1. Describe secondary principals' perceptions of agricultural safety issues within the community and school where they work.
2. Identify safety programs offered through the secondary agriscience programs.

Results

Of the respondents, 61.5% were principals in rural campuses, and 34.6% taught in small towns. Males accounted for 84.6% of the respondents, while females accounted for 15.4%. Principals who live or work on farms accounted for 32.1% of the respondents, and 47.2% personally knew someone who had been killed in farm accident. None indicated that Commercial Pesticide Applicator Certification was offered by their school and only 1.9% indicated that Tractor and Machinery Operator was offered. Hunter Safety was offered by 61.5% of the respondents, and Boater Safety was offered by 7.7%. Other programs offered included ATV Safety (1.9%) and OSHA General Safety (17.3%).

Conclusions

Principals are familiar with agricultural safety issues and some even live or work on farms. Some even reported unsafe tractor operations by youth in their communities. A variety of agricultural safety programs were offered, with the exception of Hunter Safety, in very few schools. Programs such as Tractor and Machinery Operator Certification, ATV Safety, and Boater Safety, which are designed to inform students about the most injurious and fatal farm hazards, were hardly offered.

Implications

Although the need exists in Northeast Texas for a variety of agricultural safety program, few schools appear to have a comprehensive approach. As a result, the level of safety awareness is expected to be lower than the national statistics indicate that it should be. Therefore, opportunities for agriscience teacher professional development in agricultural safety should be increased and promoted through principals.

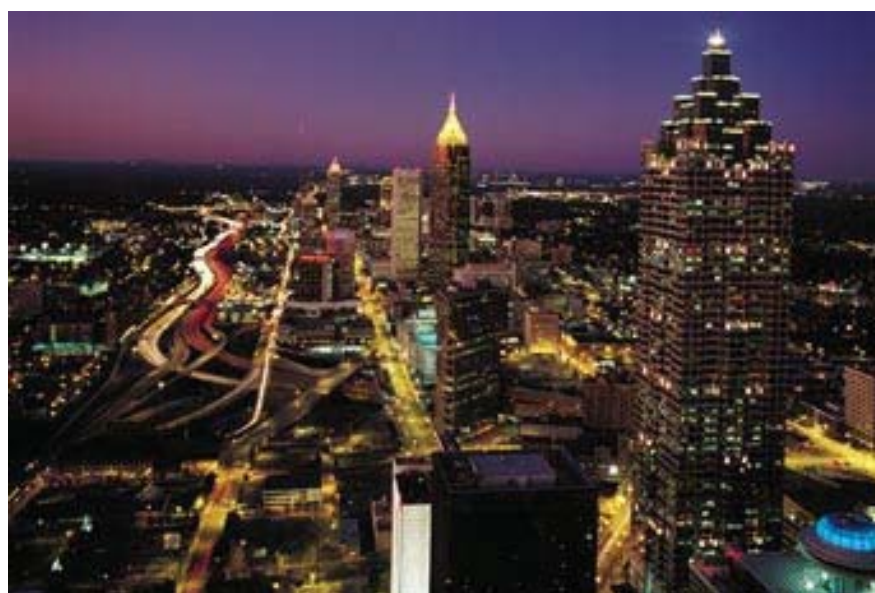
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