



## Make Safety a Priority

**P**igs are unpredictable. Barn conditions can change without notice, and farm workers can be distracted. All of these are why making safety a priority on your farm is so important. Having safety practices in place and knowing what to do at the right time can help pork producers avoid injury and minimize the impact in the event of an on-farm incident.

“Today is always a good time to review your safety protocols and update your procedures to ensure a safe working environment for you and the pigs,” said Karen Hoare, producer learning and development director for the Pork Checkoff. “A focus on safety needs to be a constant backdrop on pig farms, with the goal of always raising the bar on creating a safer overall industry.”

The incidence of non-fatal injuries and illness in hog production is eight out of 100 workers annually, according to 2015 data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics.

“It’s inevitable that injuries will happen,” Hoare said. “But we can decrease the incidence and impact of injury and illness with safety training and resources.”

Hoare added that numerous Pork Checkoff safety resources are available to producers at [pork.org](http://pork.org).

“The practical resources are a direct result of Checkoff-funded research and lessons learned and shared by America’s pig farmers for years,” she said. “With the ongoing spotlight on safety it is no coincidence that safety is one of the industry’s six We Care ethical principles: *Provide a work environment that is safe and consistent with the other ethical principles.*”

This newsletter focuses on key safety tips for your farm. For more detailed information about developing a safety program for your farm and to download safety materials, go to [pork.org](http://pork.org).

**Here is a quick safety checklist to get you started reviewing and updating your resources.**

- Provide and post an emergency action plan.
- Make first-aid kits available.
- Provide proper personal protective equipment and make sure it is available and worn, when appropriate, by employees.
- Check facilities for any condition that may cause slips, trips and falls.
- Keep a proper sharps disposal system.
- Keep all electrical panels and other fixtures free of dust, cobwebs and other debris.
- Maintain the ventilation systems within the confinement building.
- Provide increased ventilation when aerating the manure pit.
- Use correct handling tools when moving and sorting pigs.
- Mount the fire extinguishers in an obvious place that is always reachable.
- Develop a checklist specific to your operation and conduct monthly safety audits.
- Conduct monthly employee safety meetings.

**For the full safety audit checklist, go to [pork.org](http://pork.org).**



## Avoid Needle Sticks

Sticking yourself with a needle is a common injury on hog farms, but one that can be avoided. Just how common is it? More than 80 percent of U.S. farm workers in animal agriculture have accidentally stuck themselves with a needle while vaccinating animals (including pigs), according to the Upper Midwest Agricultural Safety and Health Center (UMASH).

Needle-stick injuries often occur when a pig that is being vaccinated, treated or processed suddenly jumps or moves, accidentally sticking the farm worker. To avoid needle-sticks on your farm, follow these safety guidelines from the Pork Checkoff:

- Never straighten a bent needle.
- Do not carry open needles in your pocket.
- Use caution when climbing over a pen with a needle in your hand.
- Never remove needle caps by using your mouth.
- Do not recap needles after use.
- Use the appropriate needle size.
- Use proper animal restraints.
- Dispose of used needles in a sharps container.
- Do not rest used needles on shelves or counters where others may injure themselves.
- Take extra care to avoid injury if you're tired while processing pigs.

### In Case an Injury Occurs...

Injuries and illnesses that can occur from needle-sticks may be very serious depending on the type of drug injected. Certain antibiotics and other medications designed for animals can result in severe medical reactions, or even death. Also, you could become ill with an infection if the needle is contaminated.

Remember to read package inserts, labels and safety data sheets for any medications administered to pigs. Use products only as directed on the package or as directed by your veterinarian.

In case of accidental injection, take these precautions to help keep you and your co-workers safe:

- Immediately wash the area with soap and water and report the needle stick.
- If you or a co-worker is accidentally injected with a medication and has a severe reaction, immediately call 9-1-1 for professional emergency medical services.

## Breathe Easier: Be Safe

It is crucial to your health that you have a complete understanding of all of the possible gases you could be exposed to on the farm. In hog barns, there are two forms of respiratory hazards – long-term or chronic and acute or immediate. An acute hazard makes people sick immediately upon exposure.

"You can protect the health of your employees, your livestock and yourself with some simple precautions," said the Pork Checkoff's Karen Hoare. "It's important to provide an environment that encourages safety awareness."

That includes being able to identify gases released while raising pigs and the symptoms or reactions they may cause. The Pork Checkoff has outlined the five main gases of concern.

**Methane**, released during decomposition and agitation of manure, is a colorless, odorless, usually nontoxic gas. However, it is flammable and poses an explosion hazard. Watch for pit foam and use caution, especially when agitating manure or when pressure washing a room with reduced ventilation.

**Ammonia** also is released during decomposition and agitation of manure. The pungent, colorless, noxious gas is easily detected even in small concentrations. At low levels, it can irritate your eyes, throat and lungs. Long-term exposure may make you more susceptible to respiratory diseases.

**Carbon Dioxide** is released as animals and humans breathe. Carbon dioxide is a heavy, colorless, odorless, non-flammable gas. Humans have no reaction to low levels, but a 10 percent con-

centration will cause panting and dizziness.

**Carbon Monoxide** is released from unvented heaters and gas-powered pressure washers. The colorless, odorless and very toxic gas can cause death at high concentrations. Gas-powered pressure washers should be used in well-ventilated areas.

**Hydrogen Sulfide** also is released during decomposition and agitation of manure. The flammable, poisonous gas smells like rotten eggs, but only at very low levels. Higher levels will deaden your sense of smell. Small amounts quickly and severely irritate your eyes, throat and lungs. Even low concentrations can cause immediate loss of consciousness and death.

### Be Ready to Act

If you suspect toxic gases are in an area or if people are unconscious, assume that the area contains hazardous levels of a toxic gas.

Do not enter the area or attempt a rescue without using an air respirator. Contact emergency medical services according to your farm's Emergency Action Plan.



# Prevent the No. 1 Cause of Worker Injuries

Animal handling is the leading cause of worker injuries on pig farms. This includes moving pigs from gestation to farrowing, moving sows to breeding at weaning, loading and unloading trailers, and treating and vaccinating pigs in open pens.

"Learning how pigs perceive and react to their environment in these situations can help producers become more effective handlers," said the Pork Checkoff's Karen Hoare. "The goal is to create a safer environment for both pigs and people."

She added, "Every time workers interact with pigs, the pigs are forming a history of positive and negative experiences. Pigs that have consistent positive human interactions will be easier and safer to handle."

Pork Checkoff research has helped identify the safest ways to handle pigs. Following are tips for a safe environment.

**Understand pigs' behavior** – When a handler enters a pen, pigs will evaluate the situation and decide whether the worker poses a threat. Know their flight zone, which will vary from pig to pig and may change depending on the surroundings or the situation.

**Apply appropriate pressure** – Pigs are pressured by any action that increases the level of attention they need to give handlers. Approaching and entering a pig's flight zone is pressure, as is the use of noise, visual stimuli or light physical touch. Once you initiate movement, release pressure. Smooth herd movement in a desired direction results in herd flow.

**Position your body** – Once a pig begins to move, gauge how to position yourself to apply or release pressure effectively. With every pig, imagine a point-of-balance reference point at the pig's shoulder.

**Use appropriate equipment** – Use animal handling tools thoughtfully and minimally, and keep in mind that tools are not substitutes for smart positioning. Know the designed purpose of the tool in your hand and never use barn equipment as a substitute for the appropriate tool.

**Set up a route** – When moving pigs, preparation is key. Pig instincts make them curious and wary. Allow pigs time to investigate obstacles to make moving less stressful. Anticipate distractions and remove obstacles before moving pigs.

"Excessive pressure or physical force never replaces proper preparation and patience," Hoare said.

**Be alert and read pigs** – Be aware to the behavior of pigs and be conscientious about the body language messages you are sending. Take steps to reduce stress, frustration, and the chance of injury to both pigs and people.

**To see how your farm compares with others, visit [pork.org](http://pork.org) to participate in the Safety Benchmarking tool.**



**JUST BECAUSE A NOISE DOES NOT BOTHER YOU DOES NOT MEAN THAT YOUR HEARING IS NOT BEING DAMAGED.**



## Protect Your Hearing

Hearing loss from exposure to loud noises is another key safety concern for America's pork producers and one where prevention can pay big dividends. Loud noises, or "auditory hazards," are found in every phase of pork production. An auditory hazard zone exists during any phase of pork production where noise levels are at or above 85 decibels, which is the level when hearing loss begins.

"Hearing loss maybe is not as dramatic as a physical injury from moving hogs or as the dangers posed by gases, but it is permanent," said the Checkoff's Karen Hoare. "Squealing pigs, power washers and machinery are the largest factors in hearing loss with pork production. Preventing hearing damage needs to be a daily focus."

Hoare says that a few simple steps can make a big difference:

**Remove or limit yourself from the hazard zone.** Spend no more than 15 minutes per day at a duration of 115 decibels. Pigs squealing during feeding time in a gestation barn can equal up to 100 decibels.

**Reduce the noise at the source.** For example, a power washer with the motor placed outside of the building or in another room can help reduce noise.

**Space out noisy tasks.** When you have to be in areas with loud noises, use personal protective equipment. It is important that the hearing protection you use is comfortable and fits properly.

Inside: Safety tips to help protect you, your workers and your pigs.



🌐 [pork.org](http://pork.org) or 📞 the **Pork Checkoff Service Center @ (800) 456-7675**

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## Be Proactive about Farm Safety

*By Jan Miller, chair of the Pork Checkoff Producer/Public Health and Workplace Safety Committee*

Safety is one of the non-negotiables in pork production and also is a never-ending learning process. As pork producers continually adapt to new technology, research and innovations, it's important that safety remains a focus. On our farm, we find that safety checklists are an easy way to stay proactive and to ensure that everyone is safe.

On the farm, we all need to ensure that we have safety protocols in place to meet and exceed any safety compliance recommendation. That means adjusting safety protocols to fit our farms' needs. It is easy during hectic days to overlook safety basics, such as using equipment to protect hearing, or having fire extinguishers and safety glasses ready for use. Yes, sometimes we think it is a quick job, but do not let that keep you from being safe. It can be in those quick moments that your life is changed forever.

There are numerous resources available from the Pork Checkoff that can help you establish or update your safety protocols. Take advantage of what is available to you at [pork.org](http://pork.org). The Checkoff developed these resources from research, from the experiences of pig farmers and, unfortunately, from tragedies. As farmers, we need to use all the resources available to us to be safe in our daily job. And we know that focusing on safety also benefits the pigs that we raise.

So, take a few minutes to review the safety tips in this newsletter, then dive deeper to get more tips at [pork.org](http://pork.org) to make your farm safe. It only takes a few minutes of preparation to avoid any unwanted situations, but I think you'll agree that it is time well spent for the peace of mind that it offers.

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Jan Miller,  
Belden, Nebraska



This special-topic newsletter is sent periodically to you by the Pork Checkoff.

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