Dairy Worker Safety Meeting Kit

Dairy farmers face a variety of challenges when it comes to health and safety. Workers are often dealing with large and often erratic dairy cows. Daily hazards also include accessing confined spaces like feed silos, contact with various chemicals for both cleaning purposes or medications and exposure to possibly life-threatening diseases.

HAZARDS IN DAIRY PRODUCTION AND MILKING EQUIPMENT: In addition to the physical risks of working near livestock, dairy workers can also be exposed to biological hazards and animal-borne viruses if proper precautions are not taken.

Know the pathogens and how to reduce risk. Biological hazards like bacteria, viruses and parasitic agents can be present in the dairy barn. Train workers on the best way to minimize exposure to these risks through adequate cleaning and sanitizing, properly labeling all materials in the barn and storing dangerous items in locked areas.

Work safely with milk solids. Workers should be trained to never drink raw milk, nor should they drink when pasteurizing milk. Regular milk is safe for consumption only after it’s been fully pasteurized and tested by your staff.

Adhere to standard operating procedures (SOPs). Building a routine for workers to follow when transporting and working with milk products can help to improve safety and create a more predictable work production schedule.

Chemical and Physical Hazards: Caring for the cow’s teats for milking, once they’re in a stall on the milking parlor or carousel, present the worker with **several hazards:**

- Assure a sanitary condition for milking equipment by following a checklist of tasks assigned by a manager.
- Keep water use for cleaning teats to a minimum to prevent pathogens from dripping down the teat. Use teat wipes and thoroughly dry the teat before milking to prevent mastitis and keep bacteria levels in the milk products to a minimum.
- Pre-milking teat dip should last for at least 30 seconds to ensure the teat has been sterilized.
- Defer to using post-milking teat dip versus spraying because it’s a more thorough way of decreasing mastitis and reducing bacteria from colonizing in the teat canal.
- If you prefer to keep milking-related infections to a minimum with a disinfectant spray, use a pressurized spray bottle with a stainless steel head. Spray the entire teat, from both the left and right sides and wipe the utters down with paper towels afterward.

- Be sure workers use hot soapy water to wash hands after using the restroom and after they complete their shift.

BEST DAIRY FARM PRACTICES

The objective of good dairy farming practice is the on-farm production of safe, quality milk from healthy animals under generally acceptable conditions. To achieve this end, dairy producers need to apply Good Agricultural Practice (GAP).

GOOD AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES (GAP)

Awareness around dairy bulls. Because dairy bulls are more unpredictable than their beef bull counterparts, you should always have an escape route in mind when working with them. Their temperament can shift in a moment, and they are capable of charging if threatened or startled. Staying calm around them, and all cows for that matter is key. Treating them with respect will help decrease the chances of injury.

Manage walkways and worker zones. One of the milking barn's biggest hazards to workers is the potential to slip, trip or fall while working in the milking area. Train workers to be aware of where their body, feet and limbs are in relation to the area around them. Install slip-resistant flooring where possible, maintain concrete by patching and report areas that are no longer safe. Take measures to prevent tripping, slipping or falling as a result of wet surfaces, oil spills, algal or manure buildup onto hard concrete surfaces.

Because fall risks during dairy production are so great, here are additional guidelines to consider:

- Build a schedule for flushing the lanes, and keep to it.
- Cover all open pits and ensure that those without have guard rails to prevent accidental falls.
- Install enough lighting to brightly light all work areas – day and night.
- Drainage on lanes should always be kept to a reasonable level.
- Move standing water away to drains and be sure enough slope exists on floors to draw fluids into drains.
- Keep required personal protective equipment stored and available for workers to wear at the start of each shift. Assign an employee to act as an internal compliance officer that inspects workers PPE, slip-resistant boots, etc.

Maintain fences. Moving dairy cows from the pasture or feed lot into the milking barn requires that handlers properly maintain fences to keep the livestock contained and predators out. Races, forcing pens and collecting pens should allow cattle to move safely and efficiently. They should be designed so workers can escape safely if they have to – to prevent them from getting crushed by livestock. So verify that gates and doors are properly hung and can open fully against the pen wall so that pressure against it won't force it open and release livestock into an uncontained area. Train employees to never sit on or climb fences to prevent falls and other injuries.

Safety in relocating and transferring livestock. Whether you have a parallel or rotary parlor, transferring cows to and from it exposes workers to potential hazards. Remind inexperienced workers to be cautious with young cows that may be new to milking. Although older, more seasoned animals won't hesitate when walking over a drainage grate or a puddle, cows new to milking may refuse to move in circumstances like these. If your operation requires that animals are transported by livestock trailers, they're going to need training on the best ways to get them on and off safely.

Electrical hazards and shock prevention. Working with electricity in a wet and electrically conductive environment with metal grates and steel guard rails poses a high risk for electrocution in the milking barn, both to humans and animals.

Minimizing chemical injuries. The chemicals used to sterilize and clean equipment present health risks to workers, livestock and even the environment around the milking parlor. Be sure your workers are following precautions listed on the chemical containers or the related materials safety data sheet, so they'll know the best way to handle these chemicals and how to manage accidents as well.

FINAL WORD

Dairy farms are getting larger with increased herd sizes. Health and safety should be a priority for everyone. For many industries including dairy, it isn't optional, it's legal. A safety system shouldn't just keep you and your workers safe. The right safety management system will assist with the efficiency and productivity of your workers on farm.