

Safety Guidelines for *Potato Producers*

October 2023



Over the years, growing potatoes has evolved into a highly mechanized activity. While this has greatly improved farming efficiency, it can be a dangerous environment for farm workers.

The demands of potato harvesting can also mean that workers are working long hours in extreme weather. In addition, many growers are harvesting under tight timelines which can lead to rushing and fatigue. These factors can

lead to an increased risk of accidents, especially during the harvest. To work safely with farm machinery, including powered equipment and revolving parts, everyone in the workplace must be aware of the hazards and have adequate training. The WCB recommends the following guidelines to help farmers, workers and families to stay safe on the farm.

POWERED EQUIPMENT

- Equip all machinery with the proper guarding, including chain and sprockets, PTO shafts and belts.
- Ensure that safety devices are functioning.
- Make sure that trucks and harvesters are equipped with backup alarms.
- Ensure that only designated operators are responsible for the operation of specific equipment.
- Park harvesters in a safe area, turn equipment off, remove key, and engage safety devices before any adjusting, cleaning or servicing equipment.
- Replace any guards that have been temporarily removed during maintenance.
- Ensure that equipment has safety lights, reflectors and a slow moving vehicle sign, and do not allow anyone other than the operator to ride the equipment when travelling on public roads.
- Shut off rear facing work lights when travelling roads to avoid confusing oncoming traffic.
- Be aware of power lines when moving equipment.
- Wait until the equipment and all moving parts come to a complete stop before getting on and off of the equipment.
- Once stopped, do not move the equipment until the operator, or a person designated by the operator, is sure that no one is at risk. Be aware of equipment blind spots.
- Wear a reflective vest when working around moving equipment and in the fields during harvesting.
- Have a system for workers on moving equipment to communicate with the equipment operator.
- Do not walk between the harvester and the loading truck while they are moving.
- Be aware of pinch points, moving parts or conveyors and keep clear of them.

WORKER TRAINING & SUPERVISION

- Provide annual training for workers, including family members that work on the farm, and document the training.
- Ensure that all equipment operators have training on the equipment that they are using (forklift, trucks, tractor, harvesters, etc.)
- Pay particular attention to young or inexperienced workers and their tasks, training and supervision. People under 24 and those who are new to the job are more at risk for injury.
- Older workers may have age-related changes in their hearing, vision, strength or reaction time. Be mindful of your workers' current abilities when assigning work.
- If your workers are not fluent in the language of the workplace, be sure that they understand their safety training.
- Encourage workers to speak to their supervisor or safety representative if they have questions or concerns.
- Children should be assigned age appropriate tasks

TRAFFIC CONTROL

- Park your vehicle in a designated area.
- At lunch or break times, operators stop harvesters as close to the designated parking area as possible, or bring the crew to that area in a safe manner.
- When unloading, trucks do not begin the "backing in" process until a designated person is in place to assist and direct the driver. All other workers remain clear of the operation.
- No visitors are allowed in the fields beyond the designated parking area.
- "Employees only" signs should be posted in storage areas and fields being worked.
- Inform family members and friends of your workplace policy regarding visitors.



CHEMICALS

- A wide variety of chemicals are routinely used when growing potatoes, including fertilizers, pesticides, disinfectants and anti-fungal agents. Know how to handle, use and dispose of these substances safely.
- Wear the required personal protective equipment (masks, goggles, gloves, etc.) when working with chemicals.
- Wash hands after handling chemicals especially before eating.
- Read product labels and label anything that is moved to another container.
- Know the information on Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS - specific technical information concerning chemicals). The MSDS must be readily available and up-to-date.
- Ensure that all pesticide applicators are licensed in accordance with the *Pesticide Control Act*.

SAFE PRACTICES

- Ensure that illegal drugs, alcohol and horseplay are strictly forbidden.
- Stay Alert! Do not use radios or electronic devices while working.
- Eat well and make sure you are well rested.
- Towards the end of a long shift, exercise extra caution as fatigue contributes to accidents.
- Whenever possible, conduct operations during daylight hours. Darkness creates unusual and specific hazards that must be addressed.
- Protect skin from the sun by using sunscreen, wearing cotton garments and hats, particularly on sunny days.
- Do not use cell phones while operating equipment.
- Do not work alone without having the means to communicate (cell phones, two-way radios).
- Check in regularly with workers that are working alone by routine visits or communication.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

- Wear safety footwear (CSA approved) and proper clothing for the job being performed.
- Avoid loose fitting clothing and ensure long hair is tied back.
- Use safety glasses when there is a risk of eye injury.
- Wear gloves when there is a risk of hand injury.
- Wear hearing protection whenever you need to raise your voice to be heard.
- Wear a reflective vest when working around moving equipment in the warehouses and in the fields during harvesting.

FIRST AID

- Have a first aid kit and an eye wash bottle available for each crew and keep another in the central working area.
- Ensure that one person who is trained and certified in first aid is present on-site at all times.
- Have an emergency plan available and know the civic address of your work site if you have to call for assistance.
- Put a reliable communication system in place and make sure that phone numbers (911) are known.

ERGONOMICS

- Do not lift immediately after long periods of sitting because your back may be more prone to injury. It is recommended that you walk for about five minutes before doing any lifting.
- Use proper lifting techniques:
 - Bend at the knees
 - Keep your feet apart and at shoulder width
 - Carry the load close to your body
 - Avoid twisting when lifting
- Get help or use mechanical aids for heavy or cumbersome tools.
- Warm up before working and take a few minutes at break time for stretching.
- Shift your weight from one leg to the other when

FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you have questions that aren't covered here or you need more information, please contact us. You can reach us by phone at **902-368-5680** or toll-free in Atlantic Canada at **1-800-237-5049**.

You can also reach us by email at ohs@wcb.pe.ca

For more information about safety guidelines for producing potatoes and farm safety, please visit wcb.pe.ca.

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