

Hay bale safety

Hay harvest is a fast-paced time of year. Having all-hands-on deck, adjusting plans according to the weather, and keeping equipment up and running are all critical to success. To stay on track with the season's demands, preventing injuries and keeping employees safe should be high on every farm's list. This handout can help to prepare for a safe and successful hay season.

Preparing for hay season

- Before starting the season, do a thorough maintenance check to make sure all equipment is in the best shape possible.
- Once the season begins, do a maintenance check every day before using equipment.
- Planning can prevent breakdowns. Keep the parts and repair equipment you'll most likely need on hand if you are able.

Storing hay

- Store stacks on a flat, level surface.
- If storing inside, make sure the ceiling has enough room for the equipment, especially when using stack wagons.

- If outside, make sure hay loaders or stackers are not used within 10 feet of high voltage power lines.
- If stacking small bales, use a bracing structure or poles to keep the stack stable.
- Stacks should be stacked neatly to keep them stable. Make sure your baler is set properly and making uniform, tight bales.
- Can animals (wild or domestic) get into your stacks? Animals can eat parts of lower bales or scratch against them, making stacks unstable and more likely to collapse. Consider fencing the stack if this could be a problem.
- If tarping your stack, don't tarp in windy conditions.

Moving the hay

- Strap loads properly. See page 29 of this Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) resource, Guide to Farm Trucking in Oregon (bit.ly/3YoL8Q9), for more information.
- Always check your vehicles before moving hay. Make sure tires are in good shape and don't have excessive wear. Review load capacity limits for your vehicle and trailer, and make sure brakes and lights are working.



Preventing strains and sprains

- Consider the bale size and weight if you'll be using hand crews.
- Review good body mechanics with your hand crews before starting work.
- Keep elbows as close to your side as possible to gain better leverage.
- Use your feet to get closer to the load; lift with your legs to avoid back strain.
- Review additional safe lifting tips at: saif.com/S996.

What to wear

- Full-length pants and a long sleeve shirt
- Sturdy, close-toed footwear
- Leather or rubber gloves
- Secure long hair and jewelry
- Avoid loose clothing
- Sunscreen, sunglasses, and a hat

Fire safety

- Before harvest season, create and review a fire safety plan that highlights prevention efforts, fire extinguisher use/access, and evacuation plans.
- Service all fire extinguishers annually and properly mount them in appropriate vehicles/equipment.
- Regularly blow out and service hay equipment to prevent fires caused by equipment.

General considerations and communication

- Harvest season is hard work. Accidents increase when workers are tired, stressed, and working long hours. Take care of yourself and your crew by getting enough sleep, taking breaks when needed, eating healthy meals, staying hydrated, and checking in with one another.
- Teach children about haystack safety and prevent them from playing on or around stacks. Haystacks are attractive to children as they look like a play structure.
- Set expectations so that the additional hands hired for harvest are helpful and not in the way or a hazard to themselves or others.
- Set expectations about the flow of traffic for trailers and other vehicles. Consider the location of bales, other drivers, or hand crews.
- Prepare your team for a safe and efficient harvest by holding a safety tailgate talk at the beginning of the season, and regularly throughout. Use this tailgate talk to lead the discussion: saif.com/S1198

More fire safety

Get more information about agriculture wildfire prevention, including a plan template: bit.ly/3kLRrtm.

Learn more about best practices with fire extinguishers on the farm: bit.ly/3AUKbAY.

