



**Keep children**

**SAFE**

**on the farm**

**Fatal accidents  
to children**



# Introduction



**Agriculture has one of the highest fatal accident rates of any industry in the UK and is also the only high-risk industry that has to deal with the constant presence of children. Farms are homes as well as workplaces and visitors to the countryside, many of whom are children, are often present on farms.**

**This booklet aims to raise the awareness of adults living and working in rural communities of the risks to children from agricultural activities. It helps to realise the Health and Safety Commission (HSC) aim of reducing child deaths to zero and to significantly reduce the number of injuries to children from agricultural activities.**

Using real examples, this booklet highlights the main causes of the 44 child deaths in agriculture from 1990-2000. The ways in which children have been killed varies little from year to year. The most common causes of death and major injury between 1990 and 2000 were:

- being struck by moving vehicles or objects;
- drowning;
- asphyxiation;
- falls from heights;
- contact with machinery; and
- fire.

Children between one and five years old and between 11 and 15 years old seemed to be most at risk. There were more accidents in the spring and summer than in the autumn and winter.

The children who died were:

- playing unsupervised (16 children);
- being carried as passengers on agricultural plant and machinery (nine children);
- not under proper adult supervision (eight children);
- working/helping around the farm (six children);
- trespassing (five children).

All adults in the industry need to take responsibility for keeping children safe and stopping them going to areas where they might be at risk.

# Playing unsupervised

**Children playing unsupervised are at particular risk. In the last ten years, 16 children have died while playing on farms.**

## What you can do

- Provide a securely fenced play area with enough activities to keep children busy.
- Keep children away from farming activities and work traffic where possible.
- If an unsupervised child suddenly appears in the work area, make sure everyone working on the farm knows that they should stop work immediately and take the child somewhere safe.
- If the children are old enough, tell them about the dangers they should look out for and where they are not allowed to go.

## What happened...

A four-year-old boy climbed onto a tractor left by the farmer who had got off to open a barn door. The engine was running, the wheels were turned uphill and the brakes were not applied. The boy climbed onto the tractor and turned the steering wheel, causing the tractor to move downhill. It hit a bank and the child fell through the door and under a wheel and was crushed.

***Switch off the engine, apply the handbrake and remove the keys when you leave any vehicle.***

A three-year-old boy was playing in the farmyard. A metal gate was propped against a workshop wall waiting for hinges to be fitted. The boy climbed up the rungs of the gate and it fell and crushed him.

***Store gates, tyres and other equipment flat on the ground.***

A seven-year-old girl was playing on her own in the farmyard near an uncovered full grain pit being emptied by an auger. She fell into the pit, was drowned in the grain and was dead when she was discovered.

A one-year-old boy was playing with his brothers in a fenced area. He left the safe area, went into the farmyard and through an open doorway into a shed. He fell into a sheep dip bath which had been used earlier that morning. One of the covers had been left off and the boy drowned.

***Replace the covers on unattended pits or baths.***

A 12-year-old boy drove an all-terrain vehicle (ATV). He swerved to avoid a ditch and the ATV toppled over. He fell off, was trapped beneath the vehicle and drowned in the ditch. The brakes were later found to be faulty.

***Children under 13 should not drive or ride on ATVs.***

A six-year-old boy was in a field at night where his adult cousin was towing a trailer loaded with hay bales. Although the tractor headlights were on, the boy ran in front of the tractor and was run over.

***Keep children away from farm vehicles.***



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# Carried as a passenger on agricultural plant and machinery

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**It is illegal to allow a child under 13 to ride on or drive agricultural self-propelled machines (such as tractors) and other specified farm machinery. Despite this, nine children died while being carried as passengers on agricultural plant and machinery driven by adults.**

**Children are not safe simply because they are in a cab - they can and do fall out of doors and rear windows. They may distract the operator and, if left alone in the cab, can interfere with the tractor controls, putting other people as well as themselves at risk.**

## What you can do

Do not allow a child between 13 and 16 to ride in a tractor cab unless:

- it has a properly designed and fitted passenger seat with a seat belt which is properly adjusted and worn;
- it has a safety cab or frame; and
- the operation being carried out presents no risk to the child.

## What happened...

A three-year-old boy was left in a tractor cab being driven by his 17-year-old sister. She got down from the cab to attend to some pigs, parking the tractor but with the keys left in the ignition and the engine running. The child got out and was entangled on the rotating, unguarded PTO shaft.

***Switch off the engine, apply the handbrake and remove the keys when you leave any vehicle.***

An eight-year-old boy was being carried in his father's tractor cab along a farm track. The upper section of the cab door was secured but the catch to the lower section was missing. The boy was standing in the nearside foot well when the door opened unexpectedly and he fell under the rear wheel.

An eight-year-old boy and his two brothers were passengers in a tractor driven by their father. The tractor was towing a water ballasted roller. The boy fell from the tractor and received fatal head injuries when he was run over by the roller.

***Children under 13 should not drive or ride on tractors or other self-propelled farm machinery.***



A one-year-old toddler was left in a four-wheel-drive off-road vehicle, while his father and older brother got out to tend to a flock of sheep. The hand brake was defective and the vehicle rolled backwards. His father tried to rescue him, but the vehicle swerved as it neared a boundary fence and the child was thrown from the open doorway and crushed.

***Maintain your vehicles and supervise young children.***

A five-year-old boy was sitting between his father's legs on an ATV. Travelling up a steep hill, the ATV hit a rabbit hole and both father and son were thrown from the vehicle. They were not wearing head protection. The father needed stitches to a head wound, and the child's skull was fractured.

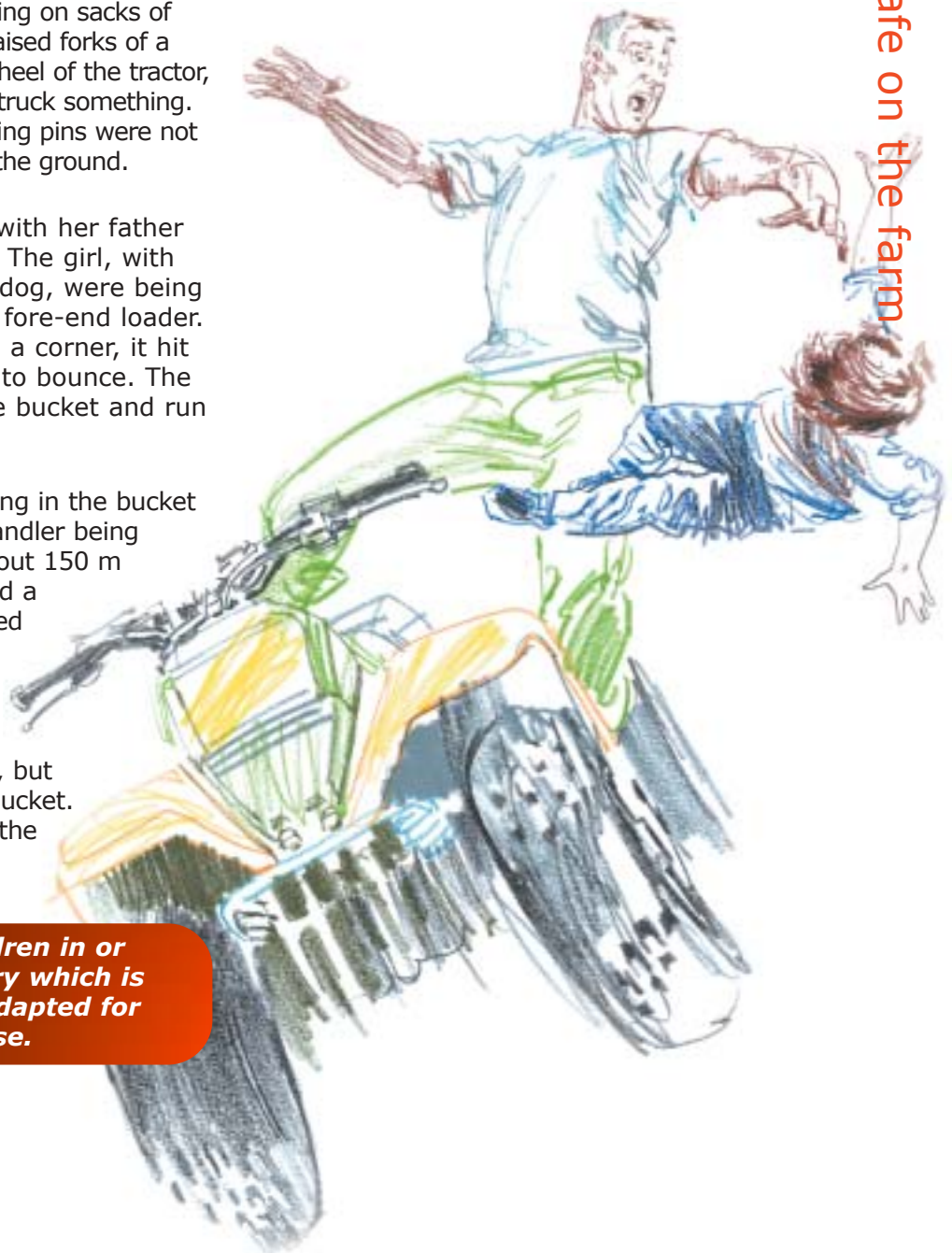
***Children under 13 should not drive or ride on ATVs.***

A four-year-old boy was sitting on sacks of grain being carried on the raised forks of a fore-end loader when the wheel of the tractor, being driven by his father, struck something. The forks tipped as the locking pins were not secured and the boy fell to the ground.

A four-year-old girl went with her father to erect an electric fence. The girl, with three other people and a dog, were being carried in the bucket of a fore-end loader. As the tractor went round a corner, it hit a rut, causing the bucket to bounce. The child was thrown from the bucket and run over by the tractor.

A five-year-old girl was riding in the bucket of a telescopic materials handler being driven by her father for about 150 m between the farmhouse and a machinery store. He stopped the materials handler and lowered the bucket to the ground. It seems that the girl tried to jump off onto some empty fertiliser bags, but rolled under the lowering bucket. She was crushed between the bucket and the ground.

***Never carry children in or on farm machinery which is not designed or adapted for the purpose.***



# Not under proper adult supervision

**Eight children died while not being properly supervised by an adult, usually a parent. The adults did not assess and appreciate the risks to children from routine work activities or supervise them closely enough.**

## What you can do

- Accompanying a parent to or while at work should not be considered as an alternative to proper childcare.
- Keep children, including those of friends, casual workers and visitors out of the farmyard or fields unless they are constantly under the close and direct supervision of a responsible adult.
- If direct supervision is not possible, provide a secure play area with suitable fencing and gates.
- Put up warning signs in dangerous areas and make sure your children know what they mean.

## What happened...

A one-year-old girl was taken by her father to an orchard where her mother was working. The farm policy was that children were banned from the site. Her father, who was not employed on the farm, tried to move apple boxes using a tractor fitted with a rear-mounted fork-lift attachment and ran over the child. He

was not authorised to use the tractor, the child was not adequately supervised and the farm's policy was not being enforced.

***Workplaces are not playgrounds - keep children away.***

A two-year-old boy went with his mother to feed chickens around the farmyard. The woman did not notice he had slipped away until she heard his voice coming from the chicken shed. It seems that he was trying to collect some eggs and held onto the laying boxes, which collapsed, falling onto his chest and trapping him.

***Children are inquisitive and will wander off - keep a close eye on them.***

A nine-year-old boy was suffocated in grass in a silage clamp on his father's farm. He was playing near the clamp and helping by opening the trailer tailgate. Despite being told to move away by his father, he continued to play in the area and was buried by the grass.

***Make sure children obey your instructions.***

A 13-year-old boy had paid to fish in a farmer's pond. Overhead power lines ran alongside the pond. The boy's carbon fibre rod made contact with the power line and he suffered a massive electric shock. He died instantly. The farmer did not appreciate the danger from rods coming into contact with overhead electric power cables.

***Think about the risks before inviting children onto your property.***



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# Working/helping around the farm

**Six children were killed while working on the farm. Children are often involved from an early age in helping on the farm, sometimes, but not always, under the supervision of an adult or older, responsible child. They may be exposed to risks from plant and machinery, animals, chemicals or stored materials. Also, older children can work on farms and agricultural holdings on school work experience schemes.**

## What you can do

- Assess the work that needs to be done and work out what information, instruction, training, supervision and precautions to provide.
- Think about the young person's inexperience, immaturity and lack of awareness of the risks.
- Give clear instructions to the young person about what they can and cannot do.
- Supervise young people at all times.

- Remember that, as well as children under 13 not being allowed to ride on agricultural self-propelled machines and other specified farm machinery, children between 13 and 16 are restricted on what machinery they can use.

## What happened...

A nine-year-old boy was helping his father by opening and closing gates. He was crushed between the trailer and gatepost as his father reversed through the gateway. The home-made trailer was too wide to pass through the gateway.

***Keep children away from moving farm vehicles.***

A 15-year-old boy was helping his father and an employee on a roof, cleaning out the valley gutter. He fell through a perspex roof light to the concrete floor some 7 m below and died from head injuries.

***Use roof ladders or crawling boards when working on or near fragile roofs.***

An inexperienced 15-year-old boy was driving a tractor fitted with a loaded silage wagon at night, without lights. On a slope, the tractor hit a dip in the ground and overturned. The seat broke from its mountings, the boy was thrown about inside the cab and died from internal and spinal injuries. The tractor was not fitted with seat belts.

***Think about the jobs you want young or inexperienced workers to do. If in doubt don't ask them to do the work.***



A 13-year-old boy was helping his father move an aluminium irrigation pipe beneath live overhead power lines. They were both holding the pipe which contacted the overhead power cable and they received electric shocks. The father passed out. When he came to, he tried unsuccessfully to revive the boy who was declared dead on arrival at hospital.

***Don't work under live overhead power lines.***

A 15-year-old boy on a work experience scheme was helping a farmer clean out grain bins. The farmer was also supervising the loading of two lorries in the yard. While loading the first lorry, the farmer and lorry driver heard the boy shout. They rushed into the grain store and found him partially buried in a grain bin but could not rescue him.

***Familiarise yourself with the precautions you need to take and provide proper information, instruction and training to young people on work experience schemes.***



# Trespass

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## Five children died after trespassing on farmyards or farm property.

### What you can do

- Provide suitable, robust and well-maintained fences, gates and warning signs to deter access.
- Clearly sign rights of way where they pass through the farmyard.
- Watch out for children trespassing and tell them to leave. If they will not, stop work and call their parents or the police.
- Report persistent offenders to their parents (if known) and the police.

### What happened...

A five-year-old boy was playing with other children on bicycles in a farmyard from which they had previously been banned. A tractor with a loaded trailer reversed to make room for another tractor and the child was crushed under the wheels. The driver did not see the boy, even though he had been careful and observant and had used his reversing mirrors properly.

*Keep a look out for and keep children away from dangerous areas and operating farm machinery.*

A 13-year-old boy fell from the back of a silage trailer and was crushed as it reversed. A group of children from a nearby housing estate had been jumping on and off a moving trailer despite being told by the farmer to stop playing on the farm.

*Work closely with the parents to keep local children off your farm.*

A 13-year-old girl was one of a group of trespassing teenagers who were playing in a large Dutch barn which was being used to store bales of straw. The farmer did not know they were there. It seems the girl lost something and used a lighted candle to look for it. The straw caught fire and she could not escape.

A 14-year-old boy with learning difficulties had been seen by other children lighting and putting out small fires earlier in the day. He died when an open shed used to store straw bales caught fire, possibly from a candle or lighter igniting the bales of straw.

*Check for evidence of children playing in straw stacks and barns.*



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# Further reading



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*Preventing accidents to children in agriculture: Approved Code of Practice L116*  
HSE Books 1999 ISBN 0 7176 1690 8

*Young people at work: A guide for employers* (Second edition) HSG165  
HSE Books 2000 ISBN 0 7176 1889 7

*Farmwise: Your essential guide to health and safety in agriculture*  
HSE Books 1999 MISC165

*Preventing accidents to children on farms*  
AS10(rev2) HSE Books 2000

*Preventing access to effluent storage and similar areas on farms* Agriculture  
Information Sheet AIS9(rev)  
HSE Books 1997

*Common zoonoses in agriculture*  
Agriculture Information Sheet AIS2(rev2)  
HSE Books 2000

*Avoiding ill health at open farms: Advice to farmers (with teachers' supplement)*  
Agriculture Information Sheet AIS23(rev1)  
HSE Books 2000

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**This leaflet contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.**

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**INDG340**

**Reprinted 7/04**

**C250**

**Printed and published by the Health and Safety Executive**