

Health and Safety Essentials for Agricultural Premises

Highlighting the principal hazards associated with agricultural premises and the key controls that can be implemented to reduce risk and maintain a safe working environment.



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Introduction

Agriculture has one of the poorest health and safety records of any industry in Great Britain. The industry accounts for just 1% of the working population but 20% of all workplace fatalities happen within the sector. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) indicate that the common causes of serious and fatal accidents include being struck by moving vehicles, being struck by moving, flying or falling objects, contact with moving machinery, falling from height and being injured by an animal.



Everyone has the right to come home safely at the end of the working day. Well-maintained buildings, safe access routes, and the proper storage of equipment and materials help protect farmers, employees, contractors, and visitors from injury or ill health. By identifying hazards and implementing effective control measures, farms can reduce the risk of accidents, comply with legal requirements, minimise disruption to operations, and promote a safe and productive working environment for everyone on the premises.

Premises Access

Effective site access, layout, and signage all play an important role in managing agricultural premises safety. The farm or company name should be clearly visible from the site entrance, with directional signage guiding visitors, visiting drivers and contractors to designated points e.g., parking and reporting points.

Public rights of way that cross the premises should be clearly marked to reduce the potential for conflict between members of the public and farm operations.

Visitors, and Public Access

Clear and well-marked routes should be provided throughout the site, including clear instructions on where visitors and contractors must report upon arrival. Vehicle traffic routes should be clearly designated and, wherever possible, separate pedestrian walkways should be provided to minimise the risk of collisions between vehicles and people.

Suitable warning signs should be displayed around the site to identify any hazards and communicate important safety information. Signs should be positioned where they are clearly visible and should warn individuals of specific risks, such as moving vehicles, hazardous substances, restricted access areas, or ongoing construction activities.

All buildings and structures should be kept secure when not in use to prevent unauthorised access, vandalism, theft, or accidental injury. Access points should be

locked where appropriate and security measures should be regularly checked to ensure they remain effective.

Areas that present significant risks, such as construction zones, excavations, hazardous work areas, or locations containing dangerous equipment, should be adequately fenced or barricaded to prevent unauthorised entry. Appropriate warning and prohibition signs should also be displayed to clearly communicate the nature of the hazard and any restrictions on access.

Where dogs are present on site, they should be always kept under proper control. Suitable measures should be in place to prevent aggressive behaviour, uncontrolled movement, or any situation that may place people at risk. Clear signage should also be provided where guard dogs or working dogs are being used.

Children

Agricultural premises are workplaces but are also often family homes and many have public rights of way through their land which may be accessed by children.

Employees must be instructed to cease all activities immediately if an unsupervised child enters their operational area. Children should not be permitted within operational work areas unless this has been subject to a suitable and sufficient risk assessment and appropriate control measures have been implemented.

Where children are present, they must not be exposed to inherently hazardous activities, must remain within a designated safe area, and must be under the continuous supervision of a responsible adult who is not directly engaged in work tasks.

Children under the age of 13 should not drive or ride in or on, farm vehicles such as tractors, combines, All Terrain Vehicles (quad bikes) and Rough Terrain Vehicles.

Unauthorised and Restricted Access

Agricultural premises often contain hazards that may not be immediately apparent to visitors, trespassers or other unauthorised persons, including moving machinery, livestock, open water, hazardous substances and confined spaces. Reasonable measures should be taken to deter and prevent unauthorised access, particularly to high risk areas, by maintaining secure boundaries, locked buildings, gates, fencing, barriers and appropriate warning signage. Attention should be given to areas accessible to children and locations where public rights of way, or public roads adjoin the premises as these features may increase the risk.

Contractor Management

Operators who require contractors to undertake specific tasks should adopt a careful selection process ensuring the competency of the contractor is considered. Contractors must be made aware of any specific hazards present at the premises, and arrangements should be established for the ongoing management and monitoring of the contractor.

Appropriate information should be provided regarding site rules, emergency arrangements and relevant risks. The farm operator should ensure that contractor

activities are suitably planned and coordinated to prevent risks arising to both contractors and others who may be affected by the work.

Vehicle and Traffic Management

Vehicle use is an integral part of agricultural operations but also presents as a high risk activity. It is therefore essential that a suitable and sufficient risk assessment is conducted to enable the required activities to be carried out in the safest manner possible. This includes first considering whether the task can be eliminated altogether. Where this is not feasible, efforts should focus on reducing exposure to the risk, followed by implementing engineering or physical controls to manage hazards.

Only where risks cannot be adequately controlled through these measures should reliance be placed on safe systems of work and personal protective equipment (PPE) as the final line of defence.

Agricultural premises should aim to segregate pedestrians from areas where vehicles such as tractors, tractors and trailers, telehandlers, sprayers, combine, and delivery and contractors' vehicles are moving and operating.

Pedestrian routes should be clearly marked and where possible physical barriers provided to introduce segregation. Adequate lighting should be provided in yard areas with the timers of operation adjusted to meet operational and seasonal work activities.

Reversing manoeuvres should be avoided where possible via one-way traffic systems, or minimised through effective site design and designated vehicle routes. Where reversing is unavoidable, appropriate controls such as strategically installed mirrors, reversing aids and audible warning devices should be provided to improve visibility and warn pedestrians and other site users of vehicle movements, particularly in areas with restricted sightlines or around buildings.

There are several control measures available to support the management of traffic flow e.g., designated traffic routes, enforced and clearly signposted site speed limits, use of convex mirrors. The risk assessment will help determine the most appropriate control measures considering the unique features of the premises, the visitor profile, the vehicles in use, and the operations undertaken.

High visibility clothing should be worn in areas where vehicles are moving or operating to help ensure pedestrians remain clearly visible to drivers. This is particularly important in yards, loading areas and buildings where vehicle movements take place.

Keys should be removed from vehicles when they are not in use or are left unattended to prevent unauthorised use.

Overhead Power Lines

The location, heights and routes of every Overhead Power Line (OHPL) should be ascertained. This can be achieved by contacting the distribution network operator (DNO).

Farm maps should be drawn up and the line routes and maximum working height under each line span marked. Workers and contractors should be issued with copies, and training must be provided to ensure they understand the map.

Workers should be aware of what to do in the event of accidental contact with an OHPL or another related emergency. The emergency telephone number for the DNO in the UK is 105 which can be dialed from any landline or mobile phone.

If there is a problem or concern with any OHPL the DNO should be contacted. The DNO may be able to re-route cables or position them underground. Where this is not possible, the DNO should be contacted to arrange for the supply to be isolated before any work is undertaken near to OHPLs.

The following tasks should NEVER be undertaken within a horizontal distance of 10 metres from OHPLs. This distance is measured at ground level horizontally from the position of the nearest wire:

- Tipping trailers or tipping lorries
- Operating equipment such as fork-lift trucks, telehandlers, sprayers or other equipment that folds/unfolds, working on top of combine harvesters or other high machinery
- Stacking bales, boxes, bags
- Erecting structures such as polytunnels or temporary structures such as marquees and scaffolding
- Handle long reaching equipment such as scaffold poles, irrigation pipes or ladders

Agricultural Buildings

Agricultural buildings present a range of hazards due to the combination of vehicles and machinery, livestock, stored materials, chemicals, and specialist work environments such as workshops, grain stores and grain drying facilities.

Inspection and Maintenance

Buildings and structures, and their contents, should be subject to regular inspection and maintenance, with particular attention given to their structural integrity, condition and continued suitability for their intended use. Focus should be placed on identifying and addressing defects that could compromise health and safety.

Floors, stairs and walkways should be always kept clear and free from obstructions to reduce the risk of slips, trips and falls and to maintain access. Handrails should be installed on steps, stairways and at any changes in level to provide additional support and reduce the risk of falls. Any spillages of grain, liquids, mud or slurry should be cleaned up promptly. Items such as tractor tyres, wheels, leaning gates and building materials should be stored safely and securely to prevent them from falling, collapsing or toppling onto anyone.

Gates should be securely hung, maintained in good working order and capable of opening and closing easily.

Fences surrounding buildings and farmyards should be regularly inspected and maintained in good condition, with any damaged or defective sections repaired or replaced without delay. Open pits should be securely covered with materials of sufficient strength to safely support people and vehicles, as appropriate for the location and intended use.

Livestock handling systems should be inspected regularly to ensure that the equipment and gates operate correctly and safely. Any defects identified should be repaired before the system is used. Handling systems should also be cleaned regularly, as the build-up of muck and dirt can conceal damage or defects. In addition, moving parts should be greased or oiled routinely to ensure they operate freely and efficiently.

Machinery and equipment should be regularly inspected and maintained to prevent unnecessary noise generation and ensure any noise control measures remain effective. Defects that could increase noise levels should be identified and remedied promptly.

Fixed Electrical Installations

The fixed electrical installations in a building should be inspected and tested on a regular basis (usually every 3-years) by a competent electrician.

Any damaged cables, equipment or electrical components should be taken out of service immediately and repaired or replaced by a competent and suitably qualified person. Due to the harsh conditions commonly encountered on farms, including moisture, dust, mechanical damage and vermin activity, electrical cables should be adequately protected e.g., with the use of armoured cables, heavy-duty rubber-sheathed cables or conduit systems.

In addition to formal inspection and testing, routine visual inspections should be undertaken at least annually to identify signs of damage, deterioration or defects caused by the agricultural environment. These checks should be carried out by a responsible person who is familiar with the installation, able to use it safely and capable of recognising obvious defects that require further investigation.

Residual Current Devices (RCDs) should be provided to reduce the risk of electric shock. Portable electrical equipment, such as pressure washers, should be supplied via circuits protected by a fixed RCD. Where fixed RCD protection is not available, an appropriate portable RCD should be used to provide additional protection.

Asbestos

Many agricultural buildings contain asbestos cement roof and wall sheets. Duty holders should establish whether asbestos-containing materials (ACMs) are present and ensure their location, type and condition are identified and recorded. This information should be used to assess the risk posed by ACMs and to develop and maintain an asbestos management plan and asbestos register.

An asbestos management survey should be undertaken by a competent person with suitable knowledge and experience. The survey should identify ACMs, assess their condition, and provide information to support risk assessment and the prioritisation of any remedial actions required.

The asbestos management plan should detail the measures in place to prevent the inadvertent disturbance of ACMs. Management options may include monitoring their condition, restricting access, encapsulation, or removal where appropriate.

Employees, tenants, contractors and others who may work on or disturb ACMs should be made aware of their location and any precautions that must be taken. Information relating

to ACMs should be made readily available before maintenance, refurbishment or other intrusive work is undertaken.

The condition of ACMs should be inspected at least annually, with the frequency increased where materials are vulnerable to deterioration or damage. Where ACMs become damaged or deteriorate, the risk should be reassessed and appropriate remedial action taken. Any work involving asbestos should only be undertaken by persons who are suitably trained and competent, and by licensed asbestos contractors where required by legislation.

Working at Height

Maintenance and inspection of farm buildings, along with several other farm related activities, may necessitate work at height. Falls from height can happen from roofs, ladders, vehicles, trailers, bale stacks, and through inappropriate access methods such as standing in telehandler buckets or on pallets.

Falls from height can be fatal or can result in serious injuries and work at height should be avoided wherever reasonably practicable. Where this is not possible, suitable access equipment such as mobile elevated work equipment or scaffolding should be provided, ensuring guardrails are present to help prevent falls.

Where the risk of a fall cannot be eliminated, fall protection should be provided. This may include fall restraint systems, which prevent a worker from reaching a position where a fall could occur, or fall arrest systems, such as safety harnesses and safety nets, which are designed to minimise the distance fallen and reduce the severity of any resulting injury.

Fragile Roofs

Fragile roof surfaces remain a significant cause of serious and fatal injuries within the agricultural sector. Many farm buildings contain materials such as fibre cement sheets, rooflights, glazed panels or deteriorated roofing systems that may not safely support a person's weight. As the condition and strength of roof surfaces cannot always be determined visually, roofs should be presumed fragile unless a competent assessment has confirmed otherwise.

Any work involving access to roofs should be properly planned, risk assessed and carried out by competent persons. Wherever reasonably practicable, the need to access the roof should be eliminated through alternative approaches such as inspections from ground level or the use of suitable access equipment. Where roof access is unavoidable, appropriate control measures should be implemented to prevent persons from stepping onto fragile surfaces and to protect against falls from height.

Buildings with fragile roof surfaces should be clearly identified, with access restricted to authorised personnel and contractors made aware of the associated risks before work commences. Roofs should also form part of a planned inspection and maintenance programme to identify deterioration, damage or defects that could affect their structural integrity and safe use.

Bales

Falls from hay and straw bale stacks, together with the risk of bales falling onto people, can result in serious or fatal injury. Risks may arise during stacking, loading, unloading, inspection, retrieval and transportation activities. Bale stacks can become unstable due to poor stacking practices, changing ground conditions, adverse weather, bale deterioration or vehicle impact. Suitable arrangements should be in place to prevent falls from height and to ensure bale stacks remain stable throughout their storage and handling.

To prevent this, bales should be stacked on a firm, dry, level ground which freely drains and a horizontal distance of at least 10m away from OHPLs. Bales should be stacked by a competent person (or directly supervised by a competent person). Non-essential personnel should keep clear of bales being stacked and de-stacked, especially when vehicles are operating. Suitable equipment should be available for loading and moving bales e.g., telehandler with bale spikes, trailer with axels and tyres capable of the load. Suitable access to the bale stacks, which may include a ladder or building bale steps i using small bales. The bucket of a tractor or forks on lifting equipment should never be used as a means of access. There should be sufficient space to allow tractors, trailers and loading equipment to manoeuvre around bales and when they are loaded and unloaded.

Bale strings, twine and netting can create significant trip hazards if left on the ground, increasing the risk of slips, trips and falls in work areas. Appropriate housekeeping procedures should be followed to ensure that bale wrapping materials are collected and disposed of safely.

Confined Spaces

Confined spaces are working environments which are enclosed or largely enclosed and present a reasonably foreseeable specified risk to persons working in that environment. Specified risks include fire, explosion, loss of consciousness, asphyxiation caused by oxygen-deficient atmospheres, and drowning from free flowing liquids or solids. Other defined risks to consider may include excessively high temperatures, machinery that could start unexpectedly, limited or restricted nature of entry or exit points, or the internal configuration that could make first aid, rescue, evacuation, or other emergency response activities difficult. In the agricultural sector this may include slurry storage tanks, grain bins, silos, ductwork, drains and sewers.

Each confined space must be assessed on its own merits, as the hazards, level of risk and necessary control measures can vary significantly depending on the location, task being undertaken and environmental conditions. Entry should only be permitted following a suitable and sufficient risk assessment, with appropriate controls implemented to either avoid entry or ensure the work can be carried out safely. Emergency arrangements, including rescue and recovery procedures, should be established before work commences, and no person should enter a confined space unless they are suitably trained, authorised and competent to do so.

Slurry Storage – Drowning and asphyxiation

Slurry pits and lagoons should be securely restricted because they present a risk of drowning and may release toxic gases that can cause serious injury or death.

Entry into buildings connected to slurry storage systems during slurry mixing or pumping operations should be prohibited. Buildings should be thoroughly ventilated and left unoccupied for at least 30 minutes following the completion of mixing activities before re-entry is permitted. Persons should not stand over slatted floors, slurry channels, slurry reception pits or slurry mixing points, including those located outdoors.

Work involving slurry storage systems should be planned and managed to prevent exposure to dangerous gases and oxygen-deficient atmospheres. Entry into slurry tanks, pits or other confined spaces should be avoided wherever reasonably practicable. Where entry cannot be avoided, work should only be undertaken by suitably competent contractors operating under a safe system of work. A suitable and sufficient risk assessment should be completed, appropriate control measures implemented, and emergency rescue arrangements established before work commences.

Slurry lagoons, reservoirs and similar storage structures should be protected against unauthorised access. Where fencing is provided, it should be robustly constructed and maintained in good condition. Fences or walls should be at least 1.3 metres high and fitted with two strands of barbed wire at the top. Where barbed wire is not used, fencing should be a minimum of 2 metres high.

Hazardous Substances, Pesticides and Fuels

Agricultural buildings are often used to store a wide range of materials, including fuels, pesticides, fertilisers, veterinary products, cleaning chemicals and other substances that may present risks to health, safety or the environment. Hazardous substances, pesticides and fuels should be stored in their original, clearly labelled containers within a secure, designated storage area and restricted to authorised persons. Storage facilities should be constructed from non-combustible materials where appropriate and provided with suitable secondary containment (bundling) to contain leaks or spills. Spill response equipment and appropriate fire extinguishing media should be readily available, and products that are no longer required should be disposed of safely in accordance with applicable waste management requirements. Access to hazardous substance storage areas should be restricted and kept locked when not in use.

Livestock Housing

Livestock housing should be designed, maintained and managed to facilitate the safe handling and care of animals while protecting workers and visitors from injury. Persons working with livestock should be adequately trained and competent in animal handling techniques, understand animal behaviour, and avoid placing themselves in situations where escape routes are restricted.

Buildings and enclosures should be provided with secure fencing and gates to minimise animal escapes. Good lighting should be provided to support safe animal husbandry activities, inspections and handling operations. Appropriate procedures should be established and implemented for bedding down, mucking out or cleaning livestock

accommodation to segregate people from animals where necessary. Floor surfaces must be of suitable construction, free-draining and kept clean to minimise the risk of slips.

Handling facilities such as races, crushes and pens should be appropriate for the type and size of livestock being managed, and enclosures should incorporate emergency escape routes or refuge areas to allow handlers to leave an animal enclosure quickly if required. Animal handling facilities should be regularly inspected and maintained to ensure they remain in good condition and operate as intended.

Provision should also be made for the isolation, treatment and management of sick or birthing animals (both during and after delivery). Certain animals e.g., bulls may require dedicated accommodation, additional physical controls and specific handling procedures to manage the increased risk they present.

Suitable hygiene arrangements should be maintained to minimise exposure to animal waste and associated health risks.

Summary

Agricultural premises contain a diverse range of hazards arising from buildings, livestock, and hazardous substances. Effective management of these risks requires a proactive approach that combines suitable risk assessment, safe premises design, regular inspection and maintenance, and the implementation of proportionate control measures.

Maintaining safe access arrangements, controlling vehicle and pedestrian interactions, restricting access to high risk areas and ensuring buildings and structures remain fit for purpose can significantly reduce the likelihood of accidents, injuries and operational disruption. Particular attention should be given to the ongoing management of hazards such as fragile roofs, ACMs, confined spaces, electrical installations and hazardous substances.

Regular monitoring, inspection and review of health and safety arrangements will help ensure that control measures remain effective and continue to reflect the changing nature of agricultural operations. By fostering a positive health and safety culture and ensuring that employees, contractors, visitors and members of the public are protected from foreseeable risks, agricultural businesses can support legal compliance, improve operational resilience and promote a safer working environment for all.

Checklist

A generic Health and Safety Essentials for Farm Premises Checklist is presented in Appendix 1 which can be tailored to your own organisation.

Specialist Partner Solutions

Aviva Risk Management Solutions can offer access to a wide range of risk management products and services at preferential rates via our network of Specialist Partners.

For more information please visit: [Aviva Risk Management Solutions – Specialist Partners](#)

Sources and Useful Links

- [Health and Safety in Agriculture - HSE**](#)

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Additional Information

Relevant Loss Prevention Standards include:

- [Health and Safety Essentials for Farm Workers](#)
- [Essential Inspections - Agriculture](#)
- [Work at Height - Harvest](#)
- [Occupiers Liability](#)
- [Asbestos in Buildings](#)
- [Dynamic Risk Assessments](#)
- [Prevention of Musculoskeletal Disorders](#)
- [Prevention of Slips](#)
- [Prevention of Trips](#)
- [Hot Working Operations](#)

To find out more, please visit [Aviva Risk Management Solutions](#) or **speak to one of our advisors.**

Email us at riskadvice@aviva.com or call 0345 366 6666.*

*The cost of calls to 03 prefixed numbers are charged at national call rates (charges may vary dependent on your network provider) and are usually included in inclusive minute plans from landlines and mobiles. For our joint protection telephone calls may be recorded and/or monitored.

Appendix 1 - Health and Safety Essentials for Agricultural Premises

Location	
Date	
Completed by (name and signature)	

	Health and Safety Essentials for Agricultural Premises	Y/N	Comments
Visitors and Public Access			
1.	Are visitor routes, reporting points, and safety signs clearly marked and/or displayed?		
2.	Are buildings, dangerous areas, pits, tanks, and holes secured or protected?		
Children			
3.	Are children supervised at all times and kept away from work activities?		
4.	Have workers been instructed to stop work if an unsupervised child enters a work area?		
5.	Are children under 13 prohibited from driving or riding on farm vehicles?		
Contractor Selection and Management			
6.	Has the contractor's competence, qualifications, and experience been assessed before work begins?		
7.	Has the contractor been provided with information on site-specific hazards, site rules, emergency procedures, and relevant risks?		
8.	Are arrangements in place to plan, coordinate, monitor, and manage the contractor's work to protect both contractors and others who may be affected?		
Vehicle and Traffic Management			
9.	Are pedestrian and vehicle routes clearly marked, segregated and protected where necessary?		
10.	Is adequate lighting provided in yards and traffic routes?		
11.	Are site traffic controls in place (speed limits, warning signs, mirrors, one-way systems)?		

Health and Safety Essentials for Agricultural Premises		Y/N	Comments
12.	Are reversing movements minimised where possible?		
13.	Is high-visibility clothing worn where required?		
14.	Are keys removed from unattended vehicles and machinery?		
Overhead Power Lines			
15.	Have overhead power lines been identified, mapped, and communicated to workers and contractors?		
16.	Do workers understand emergency procedures in the event of contact with power lines?		
17.	Are the following activities strictly prohibited within a 10-metre horizontal distance: tipping lorries and trailers, stacking bales, erecting structures (e.g. polytunnels), and handling long-reach equipment such as irrigation poles and ladders?		
Buildings			
18.	Are buildings, floors, walkways, gates, fences, and livestock handling facilities maintained in a safe condition?		
19.	Are slip, trip, and fall hazards controlled, including prompt spill cleanup?		
20.	Are stored materials stacked safely and securely?		
21.	Is plant and machinery well maintained to reduce noise exposure?		
Fixed Electrical Installations			
22.	Are periodic routine checks of the electrical installation undertaken and formal inspections and testing carried out at least every 3 years?		
23.	Are cables protected (armoured, rubber, or conduit) and any damaged cables isolated and repaired??		
24.	Are RCDs installed and used where required?		
Asbestos Management			
25.	Are asbestos containing materials identified, assessed, recorded, and inspected regularly?		
26.	Are damaged asbestos containing materials managed safely using competent contractors where required?		
Working at Height			
27.	Has work at height been avoided where reasonably practicable, and where it is necessary, risk assessed		

	Health and Safety Essentials for Agricultural Premises	Y/N	Comments
	and suitable access equipment and fall protection measures provided and used?		
28.	Are fragile roofs clearly identified and roofs included within a planned inspection and maintenance programme?		
Bales			
29.	Are bales stacked/destacked safely on firm, level ground using suitable handling equipment and competent operators?		
30.	Are bales stacked a distance of at least a 10 metre horizontal distance from overhead power lines?		
Confined Spaces and Slurry Storage			
31.	Are confined spaces and slurry hazards identified and access controlled?		
32.	Are people excluded from slurry mixing/pumping areas?		
33.	Are buildings ventilated before re-entry following slurry operations?		
34.	Are slurry lagoons/reservoirs adequately fenced and protected?		
Hazardous Substances, Pesticides and Fuels			
35.	Are hazardous substances stored securely in labelled containers within suitable storage facilities?		
36.	Are spill kits, and suitable fire extinguishers provided?		
37.	Are unused products disposed of safely?		
Livestock Housing			
38.	Is livestock housing and handling facilities appropriate for the size and type of animal being housed or handled and suitable emergency escape points or refuges for people?		
39.	Are livestock housing, fencing, gates, handling facilities (e.g. races, crushes and pens), and floor surfaces secure and maintained in a safe condition to prevent injury, animal escapes, and slips?		

40.	Additional comments:
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