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Stocked, visible first aid kit vital to farm safety

By Brandi Janssen

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A centrally located first aid kit should be well-stocked, visible and accessible.

Photo courtesy Central States Center for Agricultural Safety and Health

By Brandi Janssen

With health care settings busy and, in some cases, overwhelmed with COVID-19 cases in the upper Midwest, many people are opting to handle minor illnesses and injuries at home.

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On the farm, cuts, sprains, stings and other everyday mishaps are common. This winter, take some time to put together a comprehensive farm first aid kit to manage these minor issues safely on site, as well as to appropriately care for more significant injuries before emergency medical treatment arrives.




You should have a plan for first aid as part of your standard operating farm policies, including having one or more employees or family members with training in CPR and basic first aid procedures.

A common household first-aid kit is not adequate for use in a farm or other heavy work setting, so it's important to put some thought into what you need for your specific operation throughout the year and in different locations. A first aid kit in a tractor or combine should have supplies for emergencies and major injuries in case of an entanglement or crushing incident.

Supplies for minor injuries can be housed in a central location that can be accessed as needed. A large, centrally located first aid kit can also be used to stock smaller kits that go in tractors, trucks and combines.

The wide range of farm operations, enterprises and sizes, along with the potential for a variety of injuries, can make it difficult to recommend a one-size-fits-all first aid kit. Start with the basics: an assortment of bandages and sterile compresses, adhesive tape, antiseptic and antibiotic ointments, and burn ointment or spray for minor burns. If there is any hand-harvesting of produce, include butterfly bandages that will seal deeper cuts. You might also include larger burn dressings, cold packs for sprains and roller bandages.

Next, think through the specifics of your operation. If you apply anhydrous in the spring or fall, or if you process and sanitize food crops, an eye-wash bottle is essential to flush out chemicals from your eyes. Have a fire extinguisher in your fields after

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dark, include flashlights or flares, as well as an emergency blanket and waterproof matches.

Also think about each individual working on your farm. Does anyone have allergic reactions to bee stings? If so, make sure there is an epi-pen available. Many have learned from experience that the tractor and brush-hog will not outrun the bees whose nest has been run over.

Are any of your employees diabetic? If so, include sugar packets in the kit.

Other important general purpose items include tweezers, analgesics such as Tylenol or ibuprofen, hand sanitizer and disposable rubber gloves. The gloves can be used by a first aid provider to keep a wound clean, as well as used to cover injured fingers and hands so that the bandages stay clean and dry.

Not all farm injuries are minor. Having supplies ready to stabilize someone while waiting for emergency services can save a life. First aid kits in heavy industrial settings should include splints with elastic wraps to immobilize fractures, heavy scissors to cut clothing away, a pocket mask for resuscitation, a blanket in case of shock and bags to hold severed tissue or limbs.

A first aid kit only works well when people know where to locate it and how to use it. All kits should be clearly marked and employees need to know where they are located. Check the contents every three months to ensure that they are fully stocked and that nothing has expired. Keeping a pad and pencil in each kit so that you can jot a note when something needs to be replaced can help ensure that they are always supplied.

If you have a smartphone, download the free Red Cross first aid app, which includes step-by-step first aid advice and is fully integrated with 911 so that you can easily call for help. Or, there are first aid manuals available that can be tucked into the kits.

Ensure that all employees can direct emergency services to any farm location if necessary, and include written directions or farm coordinates for reference.



A first aid kit also only works if you put it together before you need it. It's a critical tool to ensure the safety of your family and farm workers. During the pandemic, it may also help keep minor injuries out of overcrowded clinics and hospitals, protecting the health of the whole community.

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