Orchard Safety: Communicating With Hand Signals

Hand signals can provide a standard method to communicate visually with equipment operators to keep other workers on the ground safe.

Standard hand signals were developed by the American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers (ASABE) to improve safety around farm equipment. Photo: Tara Baugher

Noise is a major hazard affecting farm workers, as it impacts their ability to communicate with equipment operators. Often this noise and the distance needed for a worker to safely be seen by equipment operators can limit the ability to verbally communicate. Some equipment tasks require a helper to assist with connecting implements or loading supplies. An increased risk for equipment runovers as well as crushing can occur.

Standard Hand Signals

Below are photos of some standard hand signals adopted by the American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers (ASABE) to communicate machine operations.

ASABE Hand Signal 1: This Far to Go

Place palms at ear level facing head and move inward to show remaining distance to go.

ASABE Hand Signal 2: Come to Me

Raise the arm vertically overhead, palm to the front, and rotate in large horizontal circles.
Example: Drive up this orchard middle.

ASABE Hand Signal 3: Move toward Me—Follow Me

Point toward person(s), vehicle(s), or unit(s). Signal by holding arm horizontally to the front, forearm and palm up, and motioning toward the body.

Example: Use this signal to motion an equipment operator to move toward you to position or move equipment in a crowded area where side visibility is poor.

ASABE Hand Signal 4: Move Out—Take Off

Face the desired direction of movement; hold the arm extended to the rear; then swing the arm overhead and forward in the direction of desired movement until the arm is horizontal with palm down.

Example: You have hitched the machine for the operator and connected the PTO; signal the person to move out for field work.

ASABE Hand Signal 5: Stop

Raise the hand upward to the full extent of the arm, palm to the front. Hold that position until the signal is understood.

Example: The tractor and forklift are now positioned for loading an apple bin onto a truck. You signal the operator to stop.

ASABE Hand Signal 6: Speed It Up—Increase Speed

Raise the hand to the shoulder, fist closed; thrust the fist upward to the full extent of the arm and back to the shoulder rapidly several times.
Example: Move the unit out now; the way is clear. We need to move on.

**ASABE Hand Signal 7: Slow Down—Decrease Speed**

Extend arm horizontally sideward with palm down; wave arm downward at 45 degrees minimum several times. Do not move arm above horizontal.

Example: You are going too fast; slow down.

**ASABE Hand Signal 8: Start the Engine**

Move arm in circular motion at waist level to simulate cranking engine.

Example: You need to signal the operator to start the engine after some adjustment has been made.

**ASABE Hand Signal 9: Stop the Engine**

Draw right hand, palm down, across the neck in a motion left to right.

Example: You need to have the operator stop the engine for some adjustments to the machinery.

**ASABE Hand Signal 10: Lower Equipment**

Use circular motion with either hand pointing to the ground.
Example: Use this signal to have operator lower high lift or machine header.

ASABE Hand Signal 11: Raise the Equipment

Make circular motion with either hand at head level.

Example: Use this signal to have operator raise high lift or machine header.

It is important to learn all 11 standard hand signals. Use them and teach them to all other workers at the farm including the farm owners.

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Additional Resource


References


American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers, ANSI/ASAE S351, Hand Signals for Use in Agriculture, St. Joseph, MI.

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