

# Safety and Health Management Planning for Biomass Producers



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# Introduction

Agriculture is one of the most dangerous industries in the United States. As farmers and ranchers grow more biomass crops, they are exposed to the many hazards in the agricultural workplace each day. In particular, individuals who have been farming for less than ten years are particularly susceptible to worksite hazards due to their limited experience.

This best practices manual provides risk-reduction information and resources for agricultural entrepreneurs and will help biomass producers plan for effective safety and health management programs. This program planning manual has five units of recommended safety and health best practices for biomass production.

A safety and health management plan must be in a written format to be viable and effective. There can be serious legal and financial consequences for producers when workers or guests are injured or become ill and the farm has no written safety and health plan. Written safety and health plans should include these major components:

- 1. Establishing Safety Policy and Procedures.** The safety policy statement for your business should be the foundation of your safety program. A safety policy is a statement of goals, objectives, and operational procedures that are created and approved by the highest-ranking owner/manager at the farm. The policy should be written and then shared with all workers on the farm. The policy should include the most important safety and health procedures that apply to all workers, family members, managers, and owners. It should also identify ways that workers are actively involved in the development and implementation of the plan.
- 2. Identifying and Assessing Hazards and Risks.** A list of methods that the business can use to inspect and/or monitor the worksite for hazardous equipment, chemicals, and environmental conditions should be compiled. It should include control procedures for eliminating or reducing the hazard to employees, customers, and the general public. See examples of hazard inspection forms in this section.
- 3. Preventing and Controlling Hazards and Risks.** The most positive approach to preventing injury and property loss is the elimination of hazardous conditions. Management should also make specific statements in the written safety program about risk reduction through the use of personal protective equipment (PPE).
- 4. Educating and Training Employees.** All aspects of employee training and education related to hazardous work conditions and safe work procedures are part of safety and health planning. Both the timing and type of training are important. Training and education should take place before new workers start work, for hazards and risks identified during seasonal tasks, for workers who are in need of retraining, and to meet legal obligations. In order for the training and education to be effective, it should be completely described with appropriate evaluation methods and tools included.
- 5. Evaluating Training Programs and Resources.** The only way to determine if safety and health training has been effective in correcting hazards and reducing risk is to evaluate the training program. Methods include:
  - Observing employees after the training has been conducted. This is referred to as “observational analysis.”
  - Administering short pre- and post-tests before and after the training session to determine if the desired knowledge gain has been achieved.
  - Having employees demonstrate their newly learned skills and capabilities after the training has been completed.

Samples of post-test evaluation tools are found in Unit 5.

# Unit 1.

## Establishing Safety Policies and Procedures

The initial unit in this manual covers the importance of implementing safety policies that are appropriate for your business. You are also provided with suggestions for getting employees involved with, and committed to, following safety and health procedures that reduce their risk for injury and illness.

**Safety policies describe the “who-what-when-where-why” of a company’s focus on safety and health. The policy should:**

1. Express the importance of safety and health in your operation.
2. Include a statement of safety and health goals.
3. Identify who is responsible for various parts of the safety and health program.
4. Make clear that responsible parties have the authority to act as needed.
5. Identify general safety rules to be followed.
6. Establish accountability procedures for complying with the safety and health program.

**Guidelines for general safety rules that are part of the safety policy should be:**

1. Broad and cut across all hazards and all workers, including family members and management.
2. Simply stated for the least knowledgeable worker.
3. In a language that all workers can understand.
4. Logical and enforceable.
5. Developed through involvement of employees.

A written safety policy is only as effective as management’s support for it. If management doesn’t follow the policies, workers can’t be expected to follow them either. Talk is cheap; you have to demonstrate a commitment to your safety policy and procedures. Enforce your safety and health policies consistently across all employee levels within your business.

Your safety policy should specify who is responsible for what rules and procedures related to the written safety and health program. This is the accountability component mentioned above. One approach is to establish an organizational chart that spells out safety and health program responsibilities. For very small operations, this chart might be simpler or perhaps not needed.

**Operator/manager:**

- Establishes and promotes safety policy and procedures
- Identifies and corrects hazardous workplace conditions
- Purchases and provides appropriate PPE
- Enforces safety policy and procedures
- Conforms to OSHA recordkeeping requirements (see page 28 in Unit 3)

**Supervisor/crew manager:**

- Performs periodic safety inspections
- Reports and records safety problems
- Communicates safety procedures
- Provides employee safety and health training
- Evaluates and documents safety training