

Dairy Safety

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According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), in 1994 there was an estimated 17,826 lost time injuries related to dairy operations in the United States. Nearly 1000 of these injuries resulted in permanent disability of the worker, and approximately 12,000 of the injuries required medical attention. Leg, knee and hip injuries were the most common, followed by arms, shoulders, and fingers. With over 9,000 injuries attributed to it, livestock handling was by far the activity most likely to result in lost-time injuries.

The cost of these injuries can be enormous. For example,

A lifting strain = \$19,000 or more

A fractured tailbone = \$50,000 or more

A bad cut = \$400 or more

Broken ribs = \$2000 or more
(Data provided by Pinnacol Assurance)

There are also hidden costs, those not directly related to the physical injury, for management to consider. They include the training of a replacement worker or the loss of production goals when there isn't anyone to take that person's place. When workers are frequently injured and job conditions don't improve, the overall morale of the group is adversely affected which can contribute to lower productivity.

In the big scheme of things, enacting safety policies and programs at your facility is the best step for protecting your employees, yourself and your operation. A walk around your dairy with an objective eye will quickly pick up risky situations. Have safety precautions been instituted to minimize these risks? On a livestock operation there are so many activities where personal injury risks exist that the idea of correcting them all can be overwhelming. The most reasonable way to start is to pick out one or two hazards that you think deserve top priority and correct them first. Often when things get fixed for safety reasons they end up making a particular job or task more efficient; thereby, improving productivity.

It is advantageous to involve one or two employees in the evaluation of hazardous situations, solutions, and enactment of safety programs. The more you involve the employees, the more buy-in you will get from them and the more likely you will be to see a change in their attitudes toward safety on the job.

In the next issue of Colorado Dairy News, I will provide a checklist of hazards that commonly exist on dairies.