

Preventing Accidents

Although most people who trespass on farms do so for recreational or nonfarm purposes (e.g., hunting, fishing, swimming, and picnicking), farms may be visited after a disaster by onlookers, do-gooders, or people trying to gain information about the care of animals or farm management practices. Whenever people visit a farm, the landowner is liable for their safety. To help prevent unwanted visitors, landowners can take a number of protective actions.

Signs should be posted around the perimeter of the farm and at all trails or roadways leading to the property. The signs should state that trespassing for any reason is not permitted. State and local authorities can provide help on the proper signs and language to use.

Ideally the entire farm is fenced, but this is often not cost effective. All fences should be in good repair. Wire fences and gates should be clearly marked with flags, a sign, or reflective markers. Livestock and horse fencing should be especially secure, in good repair, and of adequate type and height for the intended use. Gates should be kept closed and secured with a chain and lock. If pastures cannot be directly supervised, they should be padlocked.

Pastures with breeding animals (especially bulls and stallions) should not have public access or be in direct view of the public. These pastures should be overseen by reliable employees.

Ponds, wells, large stock tanks, drainage pits, and lagoons should be fenced with locked gates. If fencing of a pond or waterway is not feasible, extra effort should be made to prohibit the use of an attraction, such as a boat or dock. If possible, boats should be removed from the water and secured. Boats left in the water should be fenced with a locked gate. Rescue devices should be kept by the water for use in an emergency.

Electrical switchboxes should be locked, and high-voltage areas should be securely fenced. Machinery buildings should be kept locked if possible. If a locked storage area for machinery is not available, special effort must be made to ensure that for all machinery the keys are always removed from the ignition, the brakes are locked on, and the wheels are blocked. Hazardous passageways, hay drops, manure pits, and other dangerous areas should be fenced properly and maintained safely. Doors to haylofts should be secured and not readily accessible to the public.

Warning and hazardous area signs should be posted in all areas where hazards exist, such as loading and unloading zones, regions where augers or high amounts of electricity are found, silos, and silage and manure pits. Chemical storage areas should be kept locked, and warning signs should be posted to alert emergency crews to the presence of chemicals.

Care should be taken that all holes, pits, and quarries are filled, covered, or fenced. Ladders or other climbing devices should not be left near orchards or other hazardous areas where persons might be encouraged to use them. Persons who live in hunting areas should be familiar with firearm safety, hunting rules, and etiquette. Hunting stands in trees should not be readily accessible to children or other inappropriate persons who may attempt to climb them.

Landowners and managers should take time regularly to walk around the farm and identify possible problems. By correcting deficiencies in safety at all times, landowners and farmers can also reduce the liability they carry in a disaster.