



TITLE: Create Play Areas That Keep Kids Safe

Word Count: 738

Byline: Canadian Agricultural Safety Association

This year, for Canadian Agricultural Safety Week, the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association is working towards “Keeping Kids Safe” as a part of the three-year theme of “Be An AgSafe Family”. A part of keeping kids safe on the farm is creating, using, and maintaining a safe play area.

Play teaches children cooperation. Play helps children improve their balance and coordination, strengthen their muscles, develop eye-hand coordination and enhance their fine motor skills. Play also challenges kids’ imaginations, play makes them think and makes their minds bend and stretch and grow. Play teaches children how to problem-solve and how to be part of a team. And play lets kids be kids. By having a safe play area, children can experience the joys of play and reduce the risk of injury on the farm.

Location matters. The old saying location, location, location applies to creating a safe play area. A safe play area should be designated by physical barriers such as fences, gates or shrubs. It’s important that the play area is away from the majority of farm activity. Keep in mind traffic, livestock, farm machinery, open water, and noise when deciding where the play area should be located. Make sure the location is free of hazardous plants like poison ivy and pests like wasps. Ensure that there is sufficient shade and is free of obstacles like power lines or unstable structures. Also, make sure the location of the play area is within sight and hearing distance of a responsible adult.

When selecting a location for the safe play area make sure to keep in mind how much space the children using it will need. A small area appropriate for a three-year-old, won’t be as useful for a faster and bigger ten-year-old.

Equipment matters too. A big factor in creating a safe play area is having safe equipment that kids want to use. It’s not going to help anyone if a play area has been created and the kids don’t use it! Playground equipment, a clubhouse, balls, balance beams, and swings are all great ideas to include in your safe play area. Make sure that they are hazard-free and secure. (Protrusions like bolts can be hazardous while playing.) It’s essential that all play equipment be well-maintained and safe.

Maintaining and improving the play area is an on-going task. Develop a routine inspection and maintenance plan that includes keeping the grass mowed, checking equipment for loose or broken parts, adding protective ground surfacing and reviewing safety rules. Make improvements as needed and modifications as children outgrow the existing play equipment.

There are no guarantees that any play area is truly safe. Children can sometimes be unpredictable, and they don’t always make the safest choices. What we can do is create, use





and maintain a safe play area. Combined with careful, competent supervision, a safe play area can help reduce the risk to children on the farm.

According to the National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety, there are six steps in developing a safe play area. Here they are for quick reference:

1. Locate a site to be developed into a safe play area. The location should provide maximum play options with minimum exposure to agricultural hazards.
2. Sketch out the ideal play area for that site, considering ways to promote fantasy, manipulative, swinging, climbing, and riding activities. Plan for modifications in play activities as children grow.
3. Determine materials needed. Make, buy or adapt for different play activities. Refer to playground equipment Web sites or other resources for specific guidance related to residential play areas.
4. Build the play area including appropriate ground surfacing, borders, fences and gates. Older children can assist with this process if they are supervised.
5. Use the play area. Explain safety rules and post signs if needed. Think about immediate modifications and future changes based on how the area gets used.
6. Maintain and improve the safe play area. Develop a routine maintenance plan that includes keeping grass mowed, checking equipment for loose or broken parts, and reviewing safety rules for visitors. Let older children help with inspection and maintenance because this enhances their ownership and reinforces the importance of telling adults about possible hazards. Make improvements as needed and modifications as children grow.

For more information about Keeping Kids Safe and Canadian Agricultural Safety Week, visit agsafetyweek.ca. For more information about safe play areas, please visit agsafetyweek.ca and click on resources.

About Canadian Agricultural Safety Week:

Canadian Agricultural Safety Week (CASW) is a public awareness campaign focusing on the importance of farm safety. CASW takes place every year during the third week of March. In 2016, CASW takes place March 13 to 19. CASW 2016 is presented by Farm Credit Canada. For more information visit agsafetyweek.ca.

