



Rural Community Promotes Safety Culture

EDUCATION EVENT SAVING CHILDREN'S LIVES

By Amy Petherick for the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association

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Anyone who has ever worked with children has likely wondered at times if those children are listening and learning anything. One rural community knows for sure that their kids are listening and learning.

On an annual basis, volunteers come together in the Humboldt, SK region to talk to school-aged kids about safety. The Progressive Agriculture Safety Days® have been running since 2009, with the sole purpose of developing a culture of safety in the community. Shari Hinz, the Executive Director for Safe Communities Humboldt & Area, says that agriculture is one of the main industries in this region and it's always critical to address the hazards kids might encounter on farms in addition to general safety practices.

"There are a number of students that either reside on the farm or visit farms on a regular basis," she explains.

The event sees children rotating through safety stations and while some of these may include local emergency response staff, others will feature a local veterinarian or a farm equipment dealer. "Our presenters are all volunteers, and a number of them are based within the ag sector," Shari says. Hergott Farm Equipment has been a long standing supporter, involved right from the first event she says. Chris Hergott gives credit to his uncle, who was general manager at the time, for initially starting with the program and being enthusiastic about getting involved right from the beginning.

"He likes children, he thought it was important, and so he started doing the presentations," Chris recalls. Although they've always maintained a focus on equipment safety, the objective is general awareness rather than operational safety for these young children. "We've brought small tractors in, even yard tractors with three point lawn mowers, just to show how noisy they are, that it's important to make sure the operator is aware of your presence, never to sneak up on somebody because they can turn quickly... that type of thing."

Once he got involved, however, Chris says the students quickly became teachers for him. "I would start my presentation by asking the kids if they knew anyone who had been seriously hurt on the farm and, boom, the hands just went up," he says. "That made me aware of how important it was for us to be out there." Until it was pointed out to him by children, he says he just never noticed the injuries that accompanied so many of his customers as they visited the





dealership. “A guy can come up to the parts counter, you’ve seen him a hundred times, and it’s not until he mentions it that you see that the end of his finger is missing, and you never know how many toes a guy has.”

Suddenly, he started to see how he did his job on a daily basis with fresh eyes. He admits that he used to grumble internally about guards getting in the way while he tried to repair pieces of equipment. Now he is grateful for the same guards he used to see as inconveniences. “PTO shields are phenomenal now, to the point where if you need to work on them, it’s a real pain to get them off but I appreciate that type of thing now.”

He never expected to learn so much from these kids and laments that you can never really know if you made an equally strong impression. But Shari Hinz confides that in Humboldt, they DO know their event has saved lives already.

“We know they’re taking away positive messages from the day because we had a situation where a family was visiting relatives, the kids were at home by themselves, and they had a fire break out in the home.” Shari says the visiting children called 911 and evacuated everyone from the house safely. When asked by members of the responding fire department how they knew what to do, those same kids explained that they had been at the farm safety day in Humboldt more than one year before and that’s where they had learned exactly what to do. “Their experience saved lives that day,” she says. “That alone shows that if kids can take away one positive message from the day, it can make a difference later on.”

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Humboldt Photo 1 Cutline: Children learn about fire safety at a Progressive Agriculture Safety Day® in the Humboldt, Sk area.

Humboldt Photo 2 Cutline: Agriculture is one of the main industries in Humboldt area.

Humboldt Photo 3 Cutline: Shari Hinz, the Executive Director for Safe Communities Humboldt & Area

