

Lessons in farm safety

Life on the farm

By Dieter Krieg



When you're staring straight up at the belly of a cow and you see two hind legs coming towards you, you know you're in trouble

I was

Only a split second before it happened I was leading the animal with a rope halter. Suddenly she bolted and I ended up squeezed between a 1400-pound galloping cow and an abrasive concrete block wall. I hung on to the rope. But the cow moved on like a locomotive and I just about got smeared over the plaster. I tumbled down and instinctively raised my arms in a crossed position for what little protection that might offer.

But the cow stepped over me with legs raised high for abundant clearance.

That was just one of many lessons in farm safety which I learned the hard way.

Another dangerous episode involved that deadly machine - the forage harvester. Its sharp spinning knives are fascinating, and everyone has a healthy respect for its power and ability to chop forage crops at the rate of one ton per minute.

The scene of the accident was a hay field. I was greenchopping a load of feed for the cows and somehow managed to clog the mechanical "digestive tract" of the metal monster. It was taking the crop in, but none was coming out. That big red machine was really constipated.

I disengaged the power-take-off clutch, shut off the ignition and vaulted over the right tire of the tractor into the clover and orchard grass stubble below.

The huge flywheel with the six knives on it was still spinning when I approached the rear of the machine. Some of the gears and chains were still making their rounds too, clicking and dancing to a rhythm all their own.

I calmly loosened the latches which held the flywheel cover in place, figuring that I could do that without danger. I was wrong.

As I pulled the cover up and towards me, I somehow got just enough of a twist in it to set it up for a direct hit by the knives. Without even the slightest warning, the heavy metal cover was ripped from its hinges, hit me square in the face, and sent me flying into the stubble.

Naturally, the cover came right along. It wasn't comfortable, to say the least.

Miraculously, I didn't even get a bloody nose out of that deal. But it hurt tremendously and I almost got enough sense knocked into me to never again want to expose a part of a machine which is still in action - even if it is only due to its own momentum.

I say "almost got enough sense knocked into me" because it took a

Again, the unexpected happened. As I shoved the pipe aside in order to begin clearing it, the fan shot a heavy dose of the ammonia-based additive into my face.

The inside of my head was in such pain that I wondered if it was all there. The nasal cavities were stung severely and an extreme burning sensation engulfed my eyes. I thought I would never see again. It was one of the worst and most

picked up some momentum. The two rubber tires and our feet plowed through the mud as we pushed with all our might. Just as things were moving along well, we hit a rock or something which wasn't visible in the puddle.

The sudden stop caused the high end of the elevator to dip. Although I tried to hold my end - the loading end - down, I failed. While the top end was going down, my end went up. When the other end hit the ground, it jarred the bed from its upright supports. The cables lost their tension and the whole works tumbled.

Seeing it coming, I crouched and ran. But I wasn't fast enough. The bottom end of the conveyor hit me square in the back before I had made my getaway.

One might think that that would be an extremely painful experience, yet it wasn't. It was worse.

Even though I was safely out from under it, the conveyor, I continued to jog around the object. The frightening realization was that I couldn't breathe. My chest was in pain. I needed and wanted air and couldn't get it.

I glanced over to Ingo and Marvin and saw their frightened expressions. Later they both said they were afraid it was all over for me.

Thank God, the lungs started to function again. I felt ill, rested in bed for a while and was as good as new later in the day.

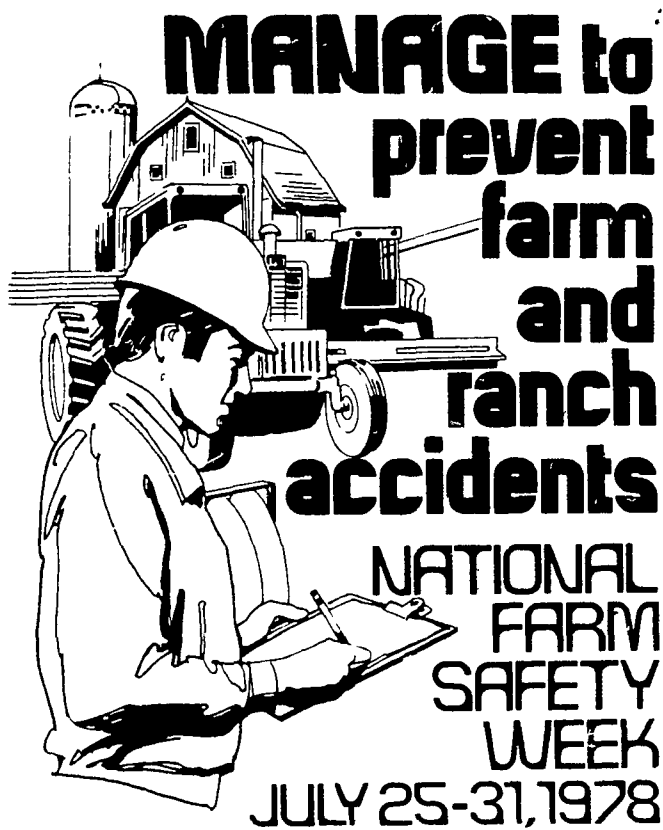
The lesson in all of this (and much more) is that life on the farm certainly carries with it some dangers. And, as is always true, the danger hides in the most unsuspecting situations.

Danger that is recognized presents little threat. But disguised or veiled danger is the potential killer.

I remember the time I drove a tractor along a field, for example, and a deep hole camouflaged by grasses, nearly upset the tractor. In a similar incident, grasses in our pasture veiled a steep slope. In other words, the sharp drop-off in the terrain began sooner than what would think if the growth of the grass is the only measurement.

One can't be too careful on the farm, whether working with livestock, equipment, or chemicals.

Please have an accident-free Summer and safe farming experiences.



similar lesson a few years later to really register the point.

Working for a friend on a Lancaster County dairy farm, I was unloading corn silage at the blower. It was a familiar routine I had been doing it for years. The only difference was that in this case we were adding an obnoxious smelling protein additive and silage preservative to the corn silage as it was being blown up to the top of the 60 foot silo.

Then the moment came which everyone unloading silage wagons dreads. The pipe clogged. So much for blowers which are supposed to be fool proof against such happenings. I shut all of the equipment off and removed the ring which held the pipe to the top of the blower.

As was true with the forage harvester accident, the machine still carried plenty of momentum in its moving parts - especially that 57-inch fan.

painful farm disasters I ever experienced.

I staggered into the milk house and flushed my face with gallons of cool water. The burning and stinging sensation ebbed. An even bigger relief was knowing that I could still see. A few minutes later I was back on the job. But I would never again let a spinning fan on a silage blower shoot ammonia into my face.

Farm accidents - like any other accidents - come unexpectedly. That was the case with a fourth accident which almost killed me.

My brother, Ingo, our hired man Marvin, and I were repositioning an all-purpose 30-foot elevator. Recent rains had left a couple of puddles and some mud in the area in front of the silos. On dry ground the rig could usually be moved by one man. On that fateful day, three weren't enough. On a final attempt to clear the muddy area, we pushed and