

Farm Safety

Murphy's Law

Every farming family knows about Murphy's Law.

"If anything can go wrong, then it will".

Let's "Get one over on Murphy".

If we can figure out what might go wrong before it actually does, then we should be able to take action to stop it.

It makes good sense to ask "What if....?" questions to "Get one over on Murphy".

The alternative is not to bother asking the questions and let Murphy's Law rule.

This may mean that you spend a lifetime of regret, trying to get to sleep with the "If only I had" statements.



Farm Maintenance and Safety **Workshop Safety on the Farm**

Poor maintenance around the farm has, and will continue to be the cause of death, severe injury and close call incidents.

Let's try to **"Get one over on Murphy"**.

Ask yourself **"What if I leave that wire netting off-cut lying by the fence?"**

Think about the risks, **"If only I had picked up that wire netting. The grass grew through it and I didn't know it was there until the post hole digger pulled it, and my leg, into the machine"**.

Housekeeping and maintenance are essential elements of ensuring health, safety and welfare on farms. Pay attention next time you hear of a farm injury and you will probably hear some "If only I had".... statements. You might benefit from the misfortune of the storyteller by asking the right "What if?" question and actually **"Get one over on Murphy"**.

Slack fences, rusty iron, broken glass, noisy machinery, poorly routed electrical leads, wobbly ladders and old stock yards, are all just waiting for Murphy to get involved.

"Get one over on Murphy" by spending an hour or two walking around the farm, including the house, and listing all the housekeeping and maintenance tasks that you have let slip. Next, set about fixing things before something goes wrong.

Some things to consider include:

- Missing machine guards, for example on drive belts and grindstones.
- Repairing or disposing of items which are worn, broken or temporarily in service (held together with string and a prayer).
- Ensuring maintenance schedules are followed.
- Keeping tools and spare parts in good condition and appropriately stored.
- Implementing a system to note actions that need to be taken to eliminate hazards or reduce risks.

The farm workshop is a particularly hazardous place. Many farmers have been injured in workshop incidents that could have been prevented. With a little bit of forethought and planning, workshops can be made safer and the risks of injury reduced.

Let's try to **"Get one over on Murphy"** in the workshop.

Ask yourself, **"What if I use this 'cut off' blade in the angle grinder?"**

Think about how it would feel to be telling your friends and family **"If only I had realized the 'cut off' wheel in the angle grinder could shatter, I would still have full use of my leg"**.

Farmers are usually good at problem solving and many are experts at improvisation. However, the home built or "She'll be right for the job" remedy can often result in increased health and safety risks.

The prize for asking the right "What if?" question to **"Get one over on Murphy"** may be to keep you and others on your farm out of the statistics of death, permanent disability and injury.

Murphy will push you towards:

- entanglement in moving machinery parts, so guard them;
- crushing caused by failure of hydraulic lifting equipment, so secure them;
- explosion of tyres, so cage split rims when inflating;
- shattering of angle grinders, so ensure grind stones are true and correct for the job;
- electrocution, so check the equipment regularly, keep leads off the floor and fit a safety switch.

By eliminating hazards, your farm workshop will be a safer place. If it is not possible to eliminate the hazard, then at least reduce the risk to health and safety by using the right tool for the job.

Ensure that the tool is used correctly and that guards and shields are in place. Most important of all is to ask yourself **"Does what I am about to do have the potential to cause injury?"**. If the answer is 'yes', then take steps to eliminate or at least minimise that potential.

Chemical Safety on the Farm

Hazardous substances used around the farm include agricultural and veterinary chemicals, cleaning agents and solvents.

Hazardous substances must not be allowed to contact the skin or eyes, be breathed in or gain entry to the mouth.

The effect of hazardous substances on health may be immediate (acute) or long term (chronic). Chronic effects may include liver or kidney damage or cancers.

Ask yourself **“What if I wipe chemical splashes off the skin rather than thoroughly washing them off?”**

You might know the answer already, **“If only I had thought more clearly. Wiping away chemical splashes only spreads the contamination and rubs the substance into the skin.”**

Successful chemical management involves more than washing hands before eating or smoking.

The first step is to identify all hazardous substances on the farm and dispose of all unwanted chemicals. Obtain material safety data sheets (MSDS) and read the section on precautions for use and safe handling information. Next, try to work out how to minimise the health risk. Keep Murphy's Law in mind.

For example:

- Have you watched the way some people work forward when spot spraying? They walk through the poison that they have just put down.
- Purchase the least hazardous effective herbicide and follow label instructions.
- Assess the breeze direction and back away from your starting point with the breeze on your back.
- Don't spray in windy conditions and ensure spray and personal protective equipment is well maintained.
- By minimising exposure to hazardous substances you may enjoy a longer and healthier life.
- People who use hazardous substances also have a responsibility to ensure that they do not contaminate the air, land, water or food used by themselves or others.

Child Safety on the Farm

It's important to ask **“What could happen if the kids use the silo for a game of hide and seek?”**

You don't want to be answering **“If only I had locked the silo, she wouldn't have 'drowned' in the grain”.**

Farmers are known for their practical approach to problem solving. Good old fashioned country nous has saved many a sticky situation.

It is time to apply that nous to safety on the farm, particularly child safety.

The seconds it takes you to ask the right “What if ...?” question may mean the difference between a healthy child who grows up to appreciate the early years on the farm, and one that doesn't.

It is also likely that the kids will pick up some good safe habits from mum and dad.

It doesn't take much imagination to see what has happened in each of the following cases where Murphy has been getting away with murder.

- Unsupervised children playing around a dam with steep slippery sides.
- A young and inexperienced child being allowed to operate dangerous machinery.
- A child helping to handle animals in a restricted space.
- A child climbing a ladder - just because it was there.
- The poisonous chemical that was put down in the workshop for a minute, then forgotten about.
- The youngster hitching a lift back to the house on the tractor.
- Loose clothing being worn while standing near augers.
- Entry into unrestricted confined spaces (you cannot see suffocating gases).
- Unsupervised children using the farm workshop and hazardous tools.
- Not securing firearms in accordance with accepted safe practice.
- Expecting children to be alert and to think and act like adults.

Machine Safety on the Farm

Machinery on farms can often be extremely hazardous. Far too frequently people are killed, seriously injured or have lucky escapes. With a little bit of forethought and planning, machinery could be less hazardous and the risk to life and limb reduced.

“What if I tie the tow rope around the upper linkage to pull the truck from the mud?”

Can easily lead to:

“If only I had known how easy it is to flip a tractor over backwards by towing from a high point”.

Farmers are generally good at problem solving and have a high level of mechanical aptitude.

It is time to apply that ability to solving the problem of death and injury around farm machinery.

What’s the prize for asking the right “What if ...?” question to **“Get one over on Murphy”**? Well it may mean you’ll be able to hear your grandchildren talking, help them count to ten with your fingers, or just be alive to cherish the moment.

It doesn’t take much imagination to see where Murphy may come out the winner in the following cases.

- Wearing loose clothes and working close to spinning shafts, particularly those with nipples or universals.
- Using the old unguarded log cutting saw that Grandad made.
- Driving up steep slopes instead of reversing out.
- Jumping on and off machinery instead of using the steps, particularly with muddy or greasy boots.
- Using an unroadworthy vehicle as a farm only runabout.
- Not fitting an approved roll bar on the tractor or relying on a home made roll frame constructed from heavy duty water pipes.

Other “What Ifs”

- What if I fix up this loose gate with a “farmers’ bracket” (i.e. a length of baling twine)?
Maybe if I had fixed the gate properly it wouldn’t have fallen on the neighbour when she opened it.
- What if I use that old backpack weedspray one more time before I fix the drip in the pump?
If only I’d replaced the ‘O’ ring on the backpack when it started to drip. Now its burst and I’m drenched in poison.

- What if I leave the repair of a minor wash out on the track until later?
If only I had fixed the road before the storm. Now the truck is bogged, the track is impassible and it’s too wet to repair it.
- What if I use this chisel to take the lid off the paint?
If only I had used a lever designed for lifting lids, I would not have lacerated my hand when the chisel slipped.
- What if I just grind this little bit off without using any face protection?
If only I had not been so lazy and worn eye protection, I would still have perfect vision.
- What if I support the axle on a pile of bricks while I work under the vehicle?
If only I had realized that the bricks would crack causing the vehicle to fall. I now use axle stands or a wooden block, but it won’t bring back my son.
- What if I store hazardous substances in non-original containers?
If only I had realised that the plastic container would dissolve and because I didn’t label it, I forgot it was hazardous by skin contact.
- What if I dust a flystruck sheep with insecticide powder?
If only I had know how hazardous that dusting powder was I would not have breathed it in and got it all-over my skin and clothes.
- What if I spot spray herbicides while wearing canvas or leather shoes?
If only I had worn rubber boots when spraying, the wet shoes would not have held the herbicide against my skin and I wouldn’t have this terrible itch.
- What if I set the tractor in low range, jump off and feed the hay out from the trailer?
If only I had stopped the tractor to feed out the hay I wouldn’t have slipped under the wheel.
- What if I use the start button to turn the engine over while I set the tappets on the tractor?
If only I had checked that the tractor was out of gear before I started it from the ground I would still be fit enough to run the farm.
- What if I use the machine just one more time before I replace that leaking hydraulic line?
If only I had fitted the replacement hydraulic line when I first saw the leak, now I have lost the machine and very nearly my life.
- What could happen if I let my four year old ride with me on the tractor?
If only I had said no to the tractor ride, he wouldn’t have fallen under the wheel.
- What could happen if I leave the TPL slasher in the raised position while I have a quick cup of tea?
If only I had lowered the linkage, the slasher couldn’t have dropped on him.