



Avoiding the Silent Killer: Proactiveness is Key to Preventing On-Farm Drownings

Byline: Canadian Agricultural Safety Association

When it comes to keeping kids safe on the farm, machinery and livestock safety are typically top of mind.

But with various water hazards on the farm, like dugouts, ponds, and lagoons, it's crucial not to overlook water safety and the risk of drowning on the farm. Even very shallow water can be a significant hazard for young children.

According to the latest [Canadian Agricultural Injury Reporting \(CAIR\) data](#), drownings accounted for 11 per cent of child and youth agriculture-related fatalities between 1990 and 2020.

Getting complacent about water safety can lead to unsafe behaviours or tragedy off of the farm as well. The [Lifesaving Society](#) reports that across Canada, drowning is the primary cause of unintentional injury death among children between the ages of one and four and the second leading cause of death for children under 10.

That's why being proactive with water safety with children from an early age is so important.

Below are a few tips to help heighten water safety on your farm and prevent drowning hazards to keep everyone safe.

Be Aware of Water Hazards

When assessing safety risks on the farm, always consider the different water hazards around the farm property and how to address them. That includes shallow water like ditches, as children can drown in less than two inches of water.

Either empty or seal any containers holding rainwater to prevent children from gaining access and have rescue equipment within reach of any bodies of water. Keep areas around water sources free of slipping or tripping hazards, and be mindful that water is hazardous year-round.

It's also important to make wearing a properly fitted lifejacket or personal flotation device (PFD) mandatory for children who are in or near water. Lifejackets are like seatbelts; they are only effective when used correctly.

Remember that water wings and swimming toys are NOT replacements for safety devices.



Fence It In

Whether for irrigation, fire protection, or livestock, most water sources on the farm have a specific purpose and are essential to a farm's operations. But regardless of the water's use, it's critical to ensure it isn't easily accessible by unauthorized persons – both children and adults alike.

To keep everyone safe, construct a fence or barrier around water hazards wherever possible and use signs to warn against unauthorized entry. Where you can install a barrier, make sure it has high sides with a self-closing and self-latching gate.

And if you're questioning the effectiveness of barriers around water hazards, consider this: A [research study that used CAIR data](#) concluded that installing proper barriers is one of the most effective ways to prevent on-farm drownings involving young children.

Supervise At All Times

If you've ever heard a bereaved parent say, "I only turned my back for a minute," then you know how quickly tragedy can strike. In the case of a drowning death, it only takes seconds.

Often referred to as the silent killer, children can drown quietly and quickly. Ninety-three per cent of drowning deaths for Canadian children under the age of five are due to absent or distracted supervision, according to the [2024 National Drowning Report](#).

That's why it's crucial to stay within reach of children and keep an eye on them at all times when in or around water. The optimal supervision ratio is at least one adult for every two young children and one adult for every baby. When children swim in a pond or pool, ensure the supervising adult knows how to swim.

Considering that many farms are in rural areas, which can take a long time for first responders to reach, it's also best practice to learn first aid and CPR.

Keep in mind that safe play areas can help keep kids safe from hazards on the farm but do not replace active supervision.

Set an Example with Safe Water Behaviour

Any parent understands the meaning of "children see, children do." Children learn by watching and copying the behaviours and actions of adults around them, making it essential for parents and caregivers to lead by example with water safety.

That includes following swimming rules, wearing a lifejacket or PFD, being cautious around ice, and providing swimming lessons for children. It's also important to talk with children



about the dangers associated with water around the farm and what they should do in an emergency.

Taking a proactive approach to water safety on the farm not only helps avert tragic accidents but also promotes a lasting understanding of safe practices around water.

Remember that nearly every drowning incident is preventable.

About Kids FarmSafe Week

Kids FarmSafe Week is a public awareness campaign hosted by the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association with the aim of promoting the safety and wellness of children and youth on Canadian farms. Now in its second year, Kids FarmSafe Week takes place May 12-18, 2025, and is presented by BASF Agricultural Solutions Canada Inc. More information can be found at www.kidsfarmsafe.ca.

About the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association

The Canadian Agricultural Safety Association is a national, non-profit organization dedicated to improving the health and safety of farmers, their families, and agricultural workers. For more information, visit www.casa-acsa.ca.