

Rotating Article**For:** Week of April 21, 2003**By:** John D. Atkins
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Santa Rosa County Extension Service**'Childproofing' Your Yard or Farmstead****Overview**

Parents strive to make their homes as safe as possible for children, but children can face life-threatening dangers literally 'in their own backyards.' Yards, garages, work areas, barns, etc. may present situations which would not endanger an adult, but can be deadly to a child. These situations occur not only on farms but also in cities and suburbs and on acreages.

Safety Audit

Parents can increase their family's awareness of dangers and reduce risks by conducting a safety audit.

- To perform the audit, walk through your farms, homes, shops, and garages, then eliminate hazardous situations and change procedures for storing equipment and material to minimize dangers to children.
- Be sure to include children in the safety audit so that they will gain an appreciation of potential dangers. They respond better if shown "why" rather than just being told "don't."
- Bear in mind that children see the world from a lower vantage point than adults do. With this in mind, get down on your hands and knees during the safety audit so you can see hazards that may not be apparent when you're standing.

General Solutions

- When items must be stored by leaning them against a wall, provide anchors and supports so that they won't fall. Test stored items to ensure that they are properly secured.
- Fence off hazardous areas, including retention basins, pools and ponds, to prevent access to them.
- Consider how an item appeals to children. Horizontal bars or members of any item are an invitation for climbing and exploration.
- Keep children away from work areas.
- Prevent children from playing on machinery by storing it in a locked or fenced area when possible.
- Remove all keys from equipment when it is not in use, and keep the keys out of reach.

- Store hand tools and power tools out of reach.
- Lock sheds.
- Lock unloaded guns in a separate location away from locked ammunition.
- When feasible, place unused tires flat on the ground. If necessary to prop, make sure that they are chained or anchored to the wall. Tractor tires can weigh 1200-1500 pounds each.

Pesticides

At least half of U.S. citizens who die from pesticides are children under age 10. Follow these tips to reduce pesticide risks to children:

- **Understand how children are poisoned.**

They are attracted to containers and bright colors.

They want to imitate parents by "working" with chemicals and containers.

Children often want to put things into their mouths.

- **Know what's dangerous. Unsafe items include:**

pesticides and fertilizers, soaps, bleaches, starch, stain remover, and other cleaning products, drain cleaner; paints and related products; fuels;

Electrical Equipment

Electricity is always a danger for children. Follow these tips with wiring and electrical equipment.

- If you have children under age 3, keep cords out of their reach to prevent kids from being burned by chewing on the cords, pulling down the appliance, or becoming strangled.
- Keep children away from areas in which heaters or fans are running.
- Unplug tools and appliances and store them securely after you use them.

Play Areas

Designated play areas protect children by isolating them from farm work equipment. However, this does not eliminate the need for supervision.

One play area might be the porch of the farmhouse and the surrounding yard. A fence will reinforce the division between the work and play environments.

Try to provide appropriate play items, such as swings, scale models of farm equipment, toys, a sandbox, or playhouse, that make the play area appealing to children.

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