

HEALTH & SAFETY BULLETIN

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Ceres Rural's Health & Safety Bulletin. Each quarter, we update you on industry news, topical issues, and safety alerts with the aim of supporting you in achieving best practice on your farm or estate. This edition provides do's and don'ts for the safe carriage of passengers on farm trailers, and guidance for the safe design and use of mezzanine floors and raised storage platforms. It continues by commenting on the safe use of working dogs on shoot days. The bulletin suggests that there are unique health and safety considerations for farm cottages including for building safety and maintenance, location and farmyard risks, welfare and wellbeing and emergency preparedness. Attention then turns to a recent safety alert issued by the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) on the use of safety control levers or isolation devices, before the bulletin concludes with guidance on the safe storage of flammable liquids in containers.

SAFE CARRIAGE OF PASSENGERS ON FARM TRAILERS

With ploughing matches, autumn open days and the shooting season all approaching, carrying passengers on farm and estate trailers is a common sight. While practical, it also poses serious risks if not managed correctly. Falls, trips, crush injuries and overturns have all caused fatalities and life-changing injuries in the past.

IN ORDER TO SAFELY CARRY PASSENGERS ON FARM AND ESTATE TRAILERS:**DO**

- use only purpose-built passenger trailers with proper seating, guard rails and safe access.
- carry out risk assessments before transporting people, especially at public or shooting events.
- provide safe access via steps or ramps with handholds – never expect people to climb over sides.
- ensure secure sides and guard rails are fitted at a safe height to prevent falls.
- limit passenger numbers to the trailer's designed capacity.
- supervise boarding and travel, particularly where children or members of the public are involved.
- plan safe routes, sticking to level, well-maintained tracks and avoiding steep slopes or sharp corners.
- drive cautiously, with smooth braking and cornering, especially when passengers are on board.
- inspect trailers regularly for brakes, hitches, tyres and lighting.
- give a safety briefing to passengers unfamiliar with farm environments.
- provide fixed seating with non-slip surfaces where possible.
- keep records of trailer maintenance and inspections.

DO NOT

- use grain, silage or livestock trailers to transport people – they are unsafe and unlawful.
- allow passengers to stand or sit on trailer edges or loads.
- overload the trailer with more passengers than it was designed to carry.
- allow unsupervised access or egress when people are boarding or disembarking.
- transport passengers without insurance or proper event risk assessment.
- tow passenger trailers with inexperienced or untrained drivers.
- ignore weather and ground conditions that could increase risks of slips, overturns or falls.

For further information, see: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ais36.pdf>

MEZZANINES

Mezzanine floors and raised storage platforms are increasingly common in modern farm and estate buildings. They offer a practical way to maximise space for storing tools, parts and materials. However, poorly designed or improperly used mezzanine stores can introduce serious risks of falls, collapsing structures or injuries when moving goods. The following guidance outlines key considerations for safe design and use.

STRUCTURAL SAFETY

- **Load-bearing capacity** – a mezzanine must be engineered for the intended loads, including the weight of stored goods, racking and the people working on it. Agricultural materials can be deceptively heavy – always obtain a certified load rating from the manufacturer or installer.
- **Professional installation** – mezzanine floors should be designed and erected by competent contractors who understand farm and estate environments, including the effects of dust, moisture and vehicle movement.
- **Regular inspections** – check the structure annually for corrosion, loose fixings or damaged floor decking.

PREVENTING FALLS

- **Guardrails and kick boards** – mezzanine edge protection must conform with the Work at Height Regulations 2005 with a top guard rail at least 950mm above the edge from which people could fall, intermediate guard rails positioned so unprotected gaps are no more than 470mm, and a kickboard at least 150mm high fitted along the bottom to prevent people and objects from falling.
- **Safe access points** – mezzanines must have a fixed staircase with handrails to allow safe access and egress.
- **Loading gates** – where goods are lifted onto the mezzanine by forklift or telehandler, use a safety gate or “up-and-over” pallet gate to protect the opening. Workers should never stand in unprotected gaps.

SAFE USE & HOUSEKEEPING

- **Load limits** – post signs clearly showing the maximum load rating of the mezzanine floor. Make sure workers understand and respect these limits.
- **Good lighting** – adequate lighting reduces the risk of trips, slips or incorrect stacking.
- **Keep walkways clear** – do not allow stored materials to block access routes or stairways.
- **Spill control** – contain and dispose of spillages promptly to reduce slip risks and prevent corrosion.

HANDLING MATERIALS SAFELY

- **Mechanical aids** – avoid carrying heavy or bulky loads up stairs. Use forklifts or telehandlers to transfer goods safely, incorporating this requirement into the mezzanine design.
- **Stacking** – store heavy items at floor level and lighter items higher up. Never allow goods to overhang the mezzanine edge.
- **Training** – ensure workers know how to use the mezzanine safely, including safe lifting techniques and emergency procedures.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

- **Fire safety** – avoid storing flammable materials such as fuel or chemicals on mezzanines. Provide and maintain fire extinguishers and ensure safe escape routes.
- **Escape routes** – stairs should remain free of obstructions and lead to a clear exit. Workers must be able to evacuate quickly in an emergency.

Mezzanine stores can be a safe and efficient way to use vertical space and expand farm and estate storage space when designed and used correctly. By investing in a structurally sound installation, fitting appropriate safety features and maintaining good working practices, risks can be reduced and workers can be protected.

For related information, see: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg401.pdf>

SAFE USE OF WORKING DOGS

ON SHOOT DAYS

As the game shooting season begins on farms and estates across the country, working dogs become central to the day's success. Whether flushing, retrieving or beating, dogs are vital partners. However, shoot days combine guns, beaters, vehicles and animals in often unpredictable conditions. Without good health and safety planning, risks to people, dogs and livestock can be significant.

Farms and estates have a legal duty under the Health & Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of employees, shoot participants and volunteers. Moreover, the Animal Welfare Act 2006 stipulates that working dogs must be cared for appropriately with adequate shelter, rest, food, water and protection from harm. On a wider basis, firearms and game laws require that guns are handled with care to prevent accidental injury to dogs and handlers.

Risks to dogs and handlers arise from:

- Stray shots – dogs may break from the line or be hidden in cover, increasing the risk of accidental shooting.
- Injuries from terrain – barbed wire, sharp stubble, ditches and uneven ground can cause cuts, sprains or fractures.
- Vehicles and machinery – shoot days involve trucks, all terrain and utility task vehicles, tractors and trailers. Dogs can be run over or injured if left unsupervised.
- Heat or cold stress – long days in extreme weather without rest, shade or water can lead to exhaustion or illness.
- Disease transmission – dogs may encounter livestock, carcasses or stagnant water, posing risks of leptospirosis, lungworm and other infections.

Good practice for safe shoot days, good canine welfare and the health and safety of handlers should include:

- **Health checks** – ensuring all working dogs are fit, vaccinated, wormed and free from injury before the shoot day begins.
- **Transport** – provision of safe, ventilated crates or dog boxes for the transport of dogs, never leaving them loose in vehicles or trailers.
- **Briefing** – handlers and beaters should be briefed on the day's plan, safety zones and responsibilities for dog control.
- **Control and discipline** – dogs should be trained to stay steady to shot and whistle. Uncontrolled dogs risk flushing birds too early, running into the line of fire or injuring themselves.
- **Hydration and rest** – provision of clean drinking water and rest breaks, with it being advisable to carry collapsable bowls or bottles in the field.
- **First aid** – a basic canine first-aid kit (bandages, antiseptic wipes and tick remover) should be available. Serious injuries need immediate veterinary attention.
- **Safe handling of game** – dogs should not be allowed to chew or consume shot game, which may contain lead or be contaminated.
- **Injury checks** – examination of dogs at the end of the day including paws, ears and eyes for cuts, thorns or seeds.
- **Parasite control** – removing ticks promptly and treating for fleas and worms regularly.
- **Recovery** – allowing dogs adequate rest, food and warmth after a long working day!

All people involved in the shoot and members of the general public should be protected. Carrying heavy or struggling dogs over fences or into vehicles can cause back injuries and ramps should be used where possible. Many shoots cross public rights of way and dogs must remain under control around walkers and livestock. Finally for biosecurity, clean dogs, boots and equipment to reduce the spread of diseases such as avian influenza or sheep scab between farms and estates.



Working dogs are invaluable on shoot days, but their welfare and safe management are part of the wider health and safety responsibilities on farms and estates. By preparing well, maintaining good control and providing appropriate care, organisers and handlers can ensure that dogs contribute to a safe, efficient and enjoyable shooting season.

FARM COTTAGE SAFETY

Cottages remain an important part of life on many farms and estates, providing homes for current and retired workers or short-term seasonal staff. While they may look like ordinary houses, their location, age and connection to farm operations create some distinct health and safety considerations. Failing to manage these properly can put residents, visitors and the wider farm or estate business at risk.

BUILDING SAFETY AND MAINTENANCE

- **Structural condition** – many farm and estate cottages are older buildings that may suffer from damp, subsidence or outdated services. Regular inspection and prompt repair is essential.
- **Electrical safety** – wiring in older properties may not meet modern standards. Electrical Installation Condition Reports (EICRs) should be carried out at least every five years, with remedial work completed promptly.
- **Gas and oil heating** – annual servicing of boilers and heating appliances is a legal requirement where gas is supplied. Flues, chimneys and oil tanks also need regular checks.

- **Fire precautions** – provide working smoke alarms on every floor, heat detectors in kitchens and carbon monoxide detectors near boilers and open fires. Fire extinguishers and escape routes should be considered where cottages are part of farmyard complexes.
- **Asbestos** – older cottages may contain asbestos in roofing, insulation or textured coatings. Only trained contractors should handle surveys and removals.

LOCATION AND FARMYARD RISKS

- **Traffic hazards** – many cottages sit within or adjacent to working yards. Clear segregation of pedestrians, vehicles and machinery is vital. Speed limits and signage should be enforced.
- **Noise and dust** – residents may be exposed to machinery noise, crop drying or grain dust. Consider buffer zones, insulation or restricted working hours near dwellings.
- **Chemical storage** – pesticides, fertilisers and fuels must never be stored in or adjacent to cottages. Clear separation reduces risk of leaks, fumes or fire.
- **Children's safety** – where families live in cottages, secure fencing and gates can help keep children away from machinery, slurry pits or livestock areas.

WELFARE AND WELLBEING

- **Safe water supply** – private wells or boreholes must be tested regularly for contamination.
- **Heating and insulation** – cold, damp homes impact health. Adequate insulation and maintenance are a safety as well as welfare issue.
- **Pest control** – rodents and insects are common in rural housing. Preventative measures reduce disease risks.
- **Mental health** – living on-site can blur the line between work and home. Open communication, fair tenancy agreements and respect for tenants' privacy are important for wellbeing.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

- **Clear addresses and signage** – cottages in remote locations should be clearly identified for visitors, deliveries and emergency services.
- **Access for fire and ambulance services** – tracks must be kept clear, with gates accessible.
- **Emergency plans** – tenants should know procedures for fire, flooding or chemical spills in nearby yards.

Farm cottages may look like ordinary homes, but their proximity to agricultural operations and their age often make them higher-risk environments. Farm and estate managers who provide housing must meet legal standards, maintain buildings properly and think carefully about the health and safety implications of their location. Doing so not only protects residents but also reduces liability and strengthens the reputation of the business.

EXCAVATORS – USE OF SAFETY CONTROL LEVER OR ISOLATION DEVICES

In August 2025, the HSE issued a safety alert (Bulletin Number ED02-2025) which identified the risk that people can be struck by an excavator if the operator does not use the safety control lever or isolation device correctly.

If there are people in the operational arc of an excavator, the safety control lever should be applied, or other methods used, to isolate the machine, while at rest (tick over). Research shows unintended movements of plant occur, but use of a safety control lever or isolation device can prevent this.

In one example, during a lifting operation, a slinger was fatally crushed between the quick hitch and fixed structure. The excavator operator was leaning out of his cab to communicate with the slinger when he inadvertently made contact with the left-hand joystick, causing the excavator to slew. The safety control lever had not been applied to isolate the machine.

The HSE's safety notice identified that duty holders must, so far as is reasonably practicable, ensure the safety of persons in the working arc of slewing plant and also any load, with the proper planning, management and monitoring of work activities. Operators should use the safety control lever or isolation device correctly. Duty holders should monitor the application of, and correct use of, the safety control device. Machine operators, and people around plant, should be aware of the importance of machine isolation before approach. Machine operators should ensure that a communication is given to those around plant when it is safe to approach. Employers or duty holders must ensure that machine operators, slingers and others are competent for the task. This means that they have been appropriately trained and assessed. Competence also includes having experience, knowledge, and other qualities so machine operators and operatives can properly undertake their duties.

For further guidance, see: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/safetybulletins/excavators-safety-control-lever-isolation-devices.htm>

STORAGE OF FLAMMABLE LIQUIDS IN CONTAINERS

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) provide guidance on the safe storage of flammable liquids in containers (HSG51). Such advice is highly relevant to farms and estates where fuels, oils, lubricants, paints, solvents and crop protection products are widely used and stored. However, improper storage can present serious fire, explosion, and environmental contamination hazards, as well as risking serious disruption to farming operations.

What Counts as a Flammable Liquid?

The HSE define flammable liquids as those with a flashpoint of 60°C or below – the temperature at which it can release vapour capable of ignition. On farms and estates, these include:

- Diesel substitutes and petrol used in machinery or generators.
- Solvents, paints, adhesives and degreasers used in workshops.
- Certain crop protection products (especially those that are solvent-based).
- Fuel additives and cleaning chemicals stored in small or medium containers.

Even liquids with higher flashpoints can become hazardous if stored in hot or enclosed conditions.

What are the Main Hazards on Farms & Estates?

Agricultural environments introduce several risk factors identified by HSE:

- **Vapour build-up** – poorly ventilated sheds or storerooms allow flammable vapours to concentrate.
- **Ignition sources** – welding, grinding, smoking, heaters or even static electricity can ignite vapours.
- **Spillages** – leaks from drums or containers can spread quickly across concrete or into drains, forming ignitable pools.
- **Container failure** – plastic drums in sunlight or old, corroded fuel cans can split and release contents.
- **Mixing hazards** – flammables stored alongside pesticides, fertilisers or other incompatible substances increase the severity of incidents.

What Farm & Estate Specific Examples are there?

The HSE's guidance is particularly relevant to these common agricultural situations:

- **Workshops and machinery sheds** – paints, fuels, lubricants and solvents are often kept alongside tools and welding equipment – a dangerous mix without segregation.
- **Chemical stores** – solvent-based agrochemicals should be separated from other products, especially oxidisers or fertilisers. Safety Data Sheets (SDS) must always be consulted for storage advice.
- **Field storage of fuel** – temporary storage during harvest or spraying must use approved portable containers, kept secure, shaded and away from drains or ditches.
- **Mixed-use storage** – avoid using general-purpose sheds for flammables, designating a specific store or cabinet that meets HSE standards.

What Control Measures Should Farms & Estates Use?

The HSE emphasise that containers themselves are the first line of defence. Farms and estates should use UN-approved, chemical-resistant containers with secure closures, avoid overfilling and allow space for expansion in hot weather, and protect containers from sunlight and mechanical damage. In addition:

- **Ventilation** – outdoor storage is best. If indoors, provide cross-flow ventilation or mechanical extraction.
- **Spillage** containment – store on impermeable floors with bunds, drip trays or raised lips capable of holding at least 110% of the largest container's volume.
- **Ignition control** – prohibit smoking and naked flames near stores, avoid hot work (grinding or welding) in or near storage areas unless controlled under a permit-to-work system, and ensure all electrical equipment in storage areas is suitable for use in hazardous atmospheres.
- **Segregation** – keep flammables away from fertilisers, pesticides, timber, straw, hay and packaging.
- **Security** – keep stores locked shut when not in use to prevent unauthorised access, tampering, vandalism or arson, while ensuring emergency exits remain accessible.

- **Emergency preparedness** – keep absorbent materials on hand to deal with minor leak, training workers in safe spill response and fire procedures, provide appropriate, maintained and clearly marked fire extinguishers that workers are trained to use, establish a clear evacuation plan and assembly point, and liaise with the local fire and rescue service about the type and volume of substances stored.

For further information, see: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/priced/hsg51.pdf>

GET IN TOUCH

If you would like to discuss any topics raised in this issue of the Health & Safety Bulletin, do not hesitate to contact our Health & Safety Guidance expert.



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