

Kansas AgrAbility Project

Safety Tips for Farming with a Visual Impairment

The term “visual impairment” is generally used to describe a condition in which an individual has some limitation due to uncorrectable visual acuity. Acuity describes the amount of detail and individual sees compared to what a person with normal vision sees. The phrase “20/20” vision refers to how acuity is measured. The first number, 20, refers to the distance (feet) at which measurement was taken; the second number, 20, refers to the distance (feet) at which a “normal” eye can see a specific size image.

The term “low vision” is used to describe visual acuity correctable to 20/50 or less, but the individual does have some usable vision. “Blindness” in legal terms, is visual acuity of 20/200 in the best eye with the best possible correction. An individual can be legally blind, yet have some functional vision and also be both, “visually impaired” and considered to be in the “low vision” category.

The following tips are offered to make farm tasks easier and safer for visually impaired producers.

Wind chimes: Not only do wind chimes look and sound nice, they can also be a sonic landmark. Hang them on the house to mark the major point of return, or “tune” your farm buildings by using different chimes to identify different buildings. Chimes can be made from copper or aluminum tubing suspended with fishing line. Different lengths and diameters make different sounds and depending on your musical talent, can be made to make very pleasant sounds.

Tennis Balls: A tennis ball hanging on string or a piece of twine can provide a marker to tell you when to stop a vehicle or piece of equipment as you drive into a garage or building. You can even use a child’s playground ball, which can be purchased inexpensively at a discount or grocery store. The idea is to run into something on purpose to avoid running into something accidentally (that probably costs more than the ball).

Hanging Feed Sacks: Hang an old feed sack about two feet away from an overhead object such as a lowered beam or light fixture. You will hit the sack before you hit the more painful immovable object. Burlap works better than other materials because it will more likely catch on your hat making a stronger warning than material that slides off. Where heat from lights or other sources of heat is a concern, you can use fiberglass screen door mesh.

On the Boardwalk: Level the terrain on a regular path by making a board sidewalk out of scrap lumber. Pressure treated lumber is the best. The walks do not have to be continuous or elaborate, as long as they get you to your destination safely and with confidence. Maintain them well to insure your safety.

Measuring Aids: Different lengths of wood marked appropriately can be used as spacers for locating plant spacing in the garden or any repeated measurement you may have to make. A piece of wood can be turned into a gauge to measure distances, depths, and even precise dimensions for setups on saws (like a radial arm, table, band or miter saw).

Work Bench Backboard: A four by eight sheet of plywood (3/4 inch CD) mounted on the wall behind the work bench allows you to separate tools and give them a permanent place so you can always find them. Hang heavier tools lower on the board so that they don't have far to fall off.

Workbench to Work Relationship: The further you have to carry tools to a job, the harder it is to maintain order. Some equipment maintenance chores require work outside the shop, so putting tools and the work bench near the main door is practical. If weather is a concern, a "tool closet" to protect the tools can be built from plywood (CDX) and painted for durability. This "closet" can be disguised with built in benches or other features for your needs. If the need arises to do remote work, consider carefully which tools you need for the job and how to tote them.

Landmarks: Landmarks are objects that never move and let you know where you are. These can be trees, rocks, fences, or buildings. You can add landmarks to increase the safety of your travels. Shrubs, flower beds, and ornamental fixtures (like a birdbath) can be strategically placed to enhance your mobility and improve the appearance of your farm.

Old Garden Hose: A garden hose that has cracks can be used to keep you away from danger without catching on clothes or scratching. Make guards around obstacles and machinery that will not injure you using cracked garden hoses. Split a piece of hose lengthwise to make a protective surface for the edges of barrels, tanks, and buckets. Old air hose works too.

Tape and Rubber Bands: Duct tape can be purchased in various colors to color code tools such as rakes, hoes, and shovels. Loop and wrap rubber bands around small hand tools to distinguish between

items such as standard and Phillips head screwdrivers or put a rubber band on metric wrenches in the tool set to tell them from the standard ones. Use more than one rubber band on some tools to distinguish certain tool groups from others. Rubber bands can also be used to hold groups of small tools together such as little ignition wrenches or Allen wrenches.

Kitchen Magnets: If you use a metal bin system for nuts, bolts, washers, etc., put a magnet on the bin you removed items from so you can return them to the proper bin. Use magnets to hold small parts in place while you do something else. Magnets also can be used for marking the level of a holding tank.

Miscellaneous Markers: With twist ties that come with trash bags or bread sacks, you can attach about anything to a valve, a switch, a lever, a drawer, or a door. Different sizes and numbers of items such as little blocks of wood left after using a saw can be attached to implement handles or machinery to identify its function and use.

Blocks and Stops: Mark areas on your table saw or radial arm saw tables where you should never put your hands. In these areas use pusher sticks or boards you have made out of old scrap lumber. Marking these danger zones with paint, tape or marker does not guarantee safety, but acts as a reminder of the precaution you should and must take when using these tools. Use blocks of wood held in place with C-clamps as guides and stops to insure accu-

rate, straight, and safe cuts. Regardless of your level of visual impairment, always use safety glasses, goggles, or face shields when running power tools.

Timers and Creative Wiring: For the safety of sighted people on your farm, use timers on at least some of the lights in your buildings. These timers plug into a regular wall receptacle and are inexpensive. In the long run they could end up saving electricity as well as eliminate the need to check whether you turned the light on or off. With high voltage and machinery controls, use a type of breaker and try to have the various switches as much alike as possible (mount them so that up is always the “on” position or vice versa). As circuits or systems are added, be consistent in the selection and use of switches, controls, and fixtures.

Bungie Cords and Springs: Bungie cords can be used to hold doors open or closed, as gate latches, or to hold yard tools to the wall. Springs can be used to make any hinged door or lid close to whatever position you desire. Bungie cords come in a variety of lengths and can be connected to make long stretchable lines that are substantial enough to be a warning barrier but not injure people or damage clothing. Both springs and bungie cords can be used to temporarily hold something out of the way, leaving hands free to do a task. They can be left hanging out of the way when not in use.

Nails: Partially driven nails present a convenient place to hang a hat or coat but

may be hazardous to your shirt sleeve or pants leg. Form a protective cover over the nail by cutting a length of old air hose just a little longer than the nail and slide it over the nail like a sleeve. The nail will hold your hat, but it won't rip your clothes or scratch your skin. If you are hanging something that requires a small nail and the hose is not practical, use finish nails and put the nail shoulder high or higher so that it will be above where your clothing

can get caught. Remove unused, exposed nails and try to put the ones you need in out of the way places.

Written Signs: Don't hesitate to make and post signs indicating things you need done to make finding tools and doing your work easier. Sighted people need reminders to help them help you keep track of your tools and equipment.

For More Information

To contact Kansas AgrAbility call 1-800-526-3648 (1-800-KAN DO IT); www.oznet.ksu.edu/agrability. For more information on general farm safety contact: K-State Research and Extension Agricultural Safety and Health Program at 785-532-5813.

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