

How to help in farm accidents

By JOSH FLINT

RANDY Romadka, Rochester Fire District deputy chief, still remembers one particular rescue case that completely baffled him.

Romadka and crew were on their way to assist with a farm accident. Upon locating the victim, they determined they needed help in the rescue. Romadka remembers someone went to the neighbor for assistance.

"He just flat out refused to help us at all," Romadka says. After further investigation, the rescuers determined the neighbor still held a grudge because the injured farmer's grandfather had swindled his family out of land more than 40 years ago.

Romadka, a 20-year Rochester paramedic, says this was definitely a rare situation. "For the most part, farm families are more than willing to help out. I remember a field fire last year. Before we even started, four farmers were already disking around the fire to create a barrier."

Time and space

In ag accidents, Romadka says a paramedic's biggest obstacles are time and space. The Golden Hour was ingrained in Romadka's mind during his medical training. According to this principle, accident victims who arrive at the

Key Points

- Time and space are the big challenges in farm accidents.
- Know what to do if you are the first responder.
- Tell rescuers of special circumstances before they arrive.

emergency room within an hour have a much higher chance for survival.

"When you're dealing with an ag-related injury, you can take the Golden Hour and throw it out the window," Romadka says.

Since many farmers work alone, it may take some time for anyone to even learn about the injury. "Many times, it will take a spouse to go out and check on the farmer before they know something is wrong," Romadka adds.

Cell phones have helped tremendously in this category, though. He recommends always having a cell phone in the field, just for emergencies.

Even if an accident is called in immediately, it takes time for crews to get to the farm. Romadka notes that his team can get to any location within the village of Rochester within four to six minutes. "For rural calls, you're talking at least 15 minutes to some farms," he says.

This is where space becomes a

problem. The 911 system is a huge help for emergency personnel; however, it still has its flaws.

"The 911 system will get you to the center line of the road in front of the homestead," Romadka says. However, most ag accidents occur in the field. When you consider a 3,000-acre operation, this could be a long way from the home.

To streamline the process, Romadka suggests getting volunteers to set up way-points along the road if multiple turns are involved.

In one situation, he remembers volunteers set up at least five way-points to lead his team to the victim. "If there's a chance the ambulance could get stuck in the field, it's a good idea to have someone lead them out there in a four-wheel drive truck, just in case they need to be pulled out," Romadka says. Of course, don't forget the tow chain.

First-responder tips

According to Romadka, first responders are often family, farm supply personnel, hired hands, truck drivers, etc. To increase the likelihood of survival, first responders should be able to do several things:

✓ First, they must be able to clearly and accurately communicate the incident. Emergency personnel need to know how many victims are involved, what the mechanism of injury was, and the risks and hazards involved with a rescue.

✓ To help streamline the rescue process, first responders should also tell rescuers of any special circumstances while they are on the way. This allows them to call in for special equipment, if needed. For example, Romadka explains that his fire department is not set up for high-angle rescue. Therefore, if a victim is stuck at the top of grain bin, they will need to call in for back up. The earlier they know about this need, the better, he says.

✓ If the victim is already dead, this is also a special circumstance. The rescue team needs to know the victim is deceased so they do not put themselves



in danger trying to rescue someone in vain. "The reality is, we will risk a lot to save a life," Romadka adds.

✓ The first responder should also identify any potential hazards, such as a running auger. They should shut off the equipment and lock it out. This will provide a safe working environment for emergency personnel. "This is an absolutely critical phase," Romadka says.

✓ If additional volunteers pitch in to help, someone should be designated a leader early on. This will eliminate some confusion.

✓ While it's somewhat cliché, first responders should stay calm and not let emotions get in the way. Romadka remembers a tractor overturn that almost ended badly because of high emotion. A crane was called in to lift the tractor off the victim. As the harness was lowered, the father of the victim jumped on top of the tractor to hook it up. "This caused the whole tractor to shift on top of the victim," Romadka says. He understood the father's anxiety in getting the tractor off his son, but the tragedy was only magnified. Luckily, the son made it out alive, Romadka adds.

✓ To be a better first responder, consider getting trained in first aid and CPR. Also, keep a first aid kit handy. Romadka adds that both first-aid training and first-aid kits need to be kept current. Skills tend to be forgotten after years of non-use, and ointments will expire after several years.

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Properly preserving limbs

RANDY Romadka, a paramedic with the Rochester Fire Department and registered nurse, once saw a heart-wrenching scenario played out in the emergency room.

Doctors tried to reassure a farmer who had just lost his arm in a farming accident. Surgeons had heard the family had packed the arm in ice and were on the way.

"When they picked the arm up out of the cooler, water sheeted out of it, making it completely unusable," Romadka remembers.

While this is an extremely sad story, it highlights the importance of preserving limbs for a trip to the hospital. "For the surgeons to do their magic and get things taken care of, it needs to be handled correctly," Romadka adds.

Romadka recommends wrapping the limb in a damp towel. If time allows, place the towel and limb in a plastic bag. It should then be transferred to a cooler of ice. It should be kept cold, not frozen. Under no circumstances should it be immersed in water.

If multiple limbs or digits are involved in the accident, bring them all. Surgeon Michael Neumeister says he's been able to take the leftovers from several fingers and craft a working thumb and finger. This enabled the farmer to retain his ability to grasp.