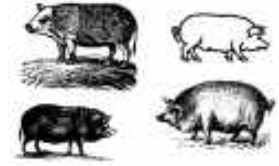




Pig Safety



Pigs are intelligent and perceptive animals. While they are considerably smaller than a fully grown cow or bull, pigs nevertheless need to be handled with care to prevent injuries to the handler and animal.

Studies have shown that the main injuries caused through direct handling of pigs are back sprain, neck injuries, slips and falls. While bites, kicks, cuts, abrasions and needling injuries are less frequent, they are equally important injuries to prevent.

Understanding pigs goes a long way towards working safely with them. The following points are key to managing a safe environment for workers.

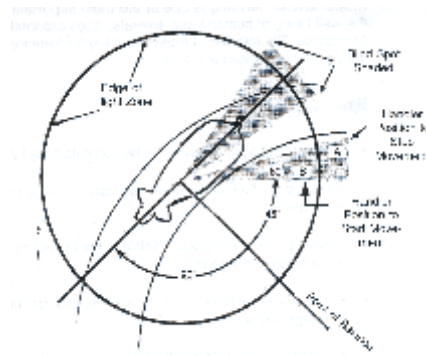
Safe Approach

A key aspect when working with pigs is to know and respect their danger zone. Pigs have a wide visual range, they can see almost 360 degrees around them. However, there is a blind zone in their immediate hindquarter area. Approaching from this direction can startle the animal. If you are behind a pig and must move forward, move off somewhat to the side and advance from a safer angle.



Flight Zone and Point of Balance

The flight zone is a pig's personal space. Moving into this zone will cause the animal to move away. The size of the flight zone varies by individual animal temperament, the degree of the animal's wildness or tameness, the angle of approach by the handler and the state of excitement of the pigs. The following diagram illustrates point of balance.



Working at the edge of the flight zone at an angle of 45 to 60 degrees behind a pig's shoulder will cause the animal to circle away from you.

Social Behaviour

Pigs are more content when with other pigs. When moving pigs, remember that they like to stick together. However, if frightened or startled, they will scatter. Isolating a pig causes it to become stressed and excited. This can pose a safety risk to the handler. Excited animals are more unpredictable.



Physical Characteristics

A number of various factors must be taken into consideration in order to handle pigs safely. These factors are age, sex, breed, weight, temperament and training of the animal.

Pigs are large animals. They are heavy enough to knock a person over. They are also capable of biting with enough force to cause serious injury.

Gender plays a key role in understanding pig behaviour. Females are normally docile animals, although a sow with piglets may fiercely try to protect her litter. Boars are unpredictable and can be aggressive. They should never be trusted.



Rooting/ Roughness

Pigs can be physically demanding on the handler. Only persons physically capable of withstanding the frequent pushing and shoving should be able to enter a pen with several pigs in it. If an individual falls and can't get up, severe injuries can occur very quickly.

Knee injuries can easily occur around pigs. Because their height puts them at a person's knee level, a good shove from the animal can cause painful damage. This is especially if the shove comes from the side as it can dislocate a knee. Try to position your body to prevent these side-on collisions.

Rooting is a normal behaviour for pigs. They begin with their head tucked low, then quickly bring it up as if rooting something out of the ground. This may cause harm, especially if the handler is caught off guard as it could easily knock a person down.

Noise

Working with swine exposes the handler to situations involving high noise levels. A short sudden squeal may cause ear damage. The following chart compares noise levels from pig barns with other sources for comparison. Hearing protection should be worn when noise levels exceed 85 decibels.

Source of Noise	Decibel Level
Swine barn nursery	66-69
Swine barn gestation	95-104
Swine in confinement at feeding	121-133
Ordinary conversation	60
Ventilation fan	65-77
Chainsaw	115

Source: Centre for Agricultural Medicine, 1997



Biting

Pigs like to bite. Although the incisor teeth are often clipped when the animals are young, pigs have strong jaws and can inflict serious damage with the remaining teeth.

Tusks are a major safety concern with boars. A boar with tusks may try to “hook” a person to show his dominance. Even a boar moving his head can unintentionally harm the handler. Always use a chase board.



Checklist for Preventing Accidents

- G Are pens and alleys large and strong enough for the pigs being handled?**
- G Does the pen design assist the smooth flow of pigs? (Avoid sharp, blind corners, and ensure gates are well positioned.)**
- G Are facilities in good repair and free from protruding rails, bolts, wire and rubbish?**
- G Are handlers properly trained and physically able to carry out the required task?**
- G Where pigs need restraining, are crushes and nose ropes utilized?**
- G Do floors have non-slip surfaces, especially in alleys and loading yards?**
- G Is safety footwear worn to prevent injuries due to tramped-on feet?**



Answering yes to these questions can minimize the risk of injury or harm when handling pigs.

Task Specific Concerns

Breeding

- ! Tasks being performed put you in close contact with the pigs.
- ! The pigs are very large.
- ! Work space may be tight.
- ! Boars are unpredictable - always keep a chase board between yourself and the boar.

Processing Piglets

- ! Common injuries include punctures, cuts and needle sticks.
- ! Repetitive work leads to loss of focus from fatigue.
- ! Repetitive motion injuries.
- ! Lower back strain from standing on concrete floors.

Weaning

- ! Minimal injuries during this phase.
- ! Weaning stresses sows which can lead to aggressive behaviour.
- ! Back injuries may occur at this time from improper lifting techniques.

Nursery

- ! Injuries can occur during sorting.
- ! Lifting can cause back injuries.



Finisher

- ! Loading and unloading is another area where injuries may occur.
- ! Animals in transit are stressed and must be unloaded carefully.

Source: Manitoba Pork Council

Tips For Moving Pigs

Know the temperament of the animals you are working with. Boars are unpredictable, sows may try to defend the litter, gilts are easily stressed.

Set the barn up for animal movement before beginning to move the animals. Place gates in proper positions.

Practice good housekeeping. Eliminate areas of clutter and distraction. Keep light consistent. If loading at night, install a light in the trailer. If loading during times of bright sunlight, block the light from shining in.

Avoid overuse of muscles and joints when doing repetitive tasks by varying your activities. This will help prevent repetitive strain injuries.

Before older pigs are moved, enter each pen daily and always handle animals considerately. Pigs that trust people move more quietly and cooperatively.



Use positive behaviours such as pats and rubs when moving pigs.

Use proper moving equipment such as chaser boards, shakers, etc.

Practice good posture and lifting techniques. Lift with your legs, not your back.

Take advantage of herding instincts and move animals in small, manageable groups. Groups move better by pushing the leader, rather than pushing the whole group from behind.

Recommended group sizes for moving pigs

Entering nursery	20
Entering finisher	10
Leaving finisher	6
Breeding stock	4-6

Source: Manitoba Pork Council

Proper Handling Equipment

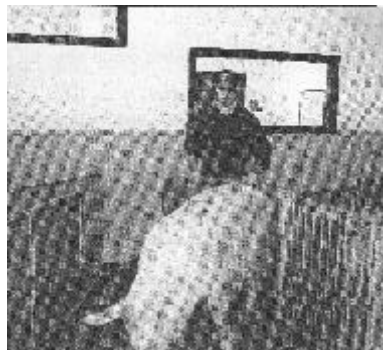
- ★ Use butterfly boards or chase boards that are properly sized for the alley the animals are moving through.



- ★ Avoid using slappers, buzzers and prods on the animal. These are stressors which may cause unpredictable behaviour.

Slappers are appropriate tools for moving pigs only if used to make noise by hitting a wall or other fixed surface. This prevents bruising to the animal.

- ★ Use paddles or brooms as smaller versions of chase boards to get sows out of crates.



Proper animal handling not only makes the workplace safer for you, it also increases pig productivity and your bottom line!

Boars

Boars are an important aspect on any breeding operation. Whether they are being used for semen collection, heat detection, etc., boars need to be handled with care.

Due to their weight and temperament, boars are capable of inflicting serious injuries. Boars are unpredictable and may be aggressive, especially when among cycling females. Be also aware of the animal's tusks!

If boars must be handled manually, a nose rope should be used to maintain control of the animal. Although a rope provides a means of restraint, the handler should be alert for any potential dangerous movement.

Always use a chase board when moving boars.

Another system of boar restraint is a boar cart. This allows the producer to move the boar past the females in a safe manner. The boar still can access the females' snouts, but is unable to pose a safety threat to the handler.



Remember to always handle boars with extreme care!