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Study takes fresh look at engaging media in farm safety coverage

Agricultural journalists have an active interest in covering safety more effectively and new opportunities exist for helping them do so, according to research published in the current issue of *Journal of Extension*.

“New Extension Approaches to Serving Agricultural Media in Advancing Farm-Life Safety Communications” focuses on injury prevention in a changing agricultural environment characterized by emerging safety risks and new communication channels.

Scott Heiberger, communications manager at the National Farm Medicine Center, Marshfield Clinic Research Institute, and Jim Evans, emeritus faculty member at the University of Illinois, conducted a survey among journalists of the Agricultural Communicators Network (formerly American Agricultural Editors Association). Their objective was to assess the journalists’ attitudes toward occupational safety coverage, their sources of safety knowledge and preferred methods of accessing safety knowledge. An online survey was sent to 150 journalists; 41 responded (27 percent).

Among survey findings:

- 78 percent of respondents stated that media coverage of safety is important. An additional 20 percent said it was “somewhat” important.
- 73 percent reported that they, or a close family member, had experienced an injury “close call” while doing agricultural work.
- Traumatic incidents and fatalities “hit home” with readers. “Attention spans are more attuned with a real incident.”
- The journalists’ top source of safety information was university specialists/educators (88 percent), followed by farm safety organizations (78 percent).

- Statistics on ag injury were the most desired type of safety information by the journalists (93 percent), followed by contact lists of safety experts (85 percent) and death/injury case reviews (66 percent).

“Another thing the journalists told us is that their reader surveys indicate low interest in safety articles,” Heiberger said. “So safety professionals need to help journalists make safety coverage more compelling, with human interest angles, data and varied messaging approaches.”

The research was part of a pilot project funded by the Upper Midwest Agricultural Safety and Health Center (UMASH) through a cooperative agreement from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

Go to the article: <https://www.joe.org/joe/2017december/rb3.php>

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