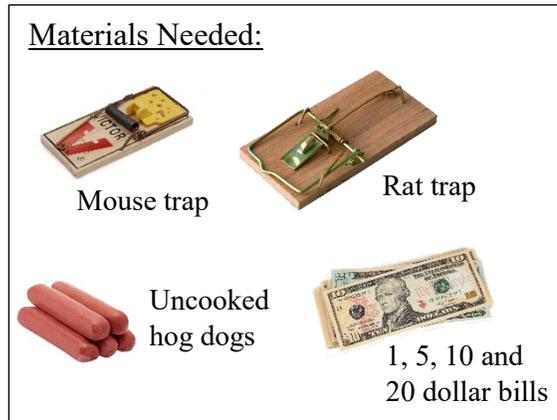


Avoid the Traps of Risk Taking

Youth, especially males under the age of 21 tend to be among the highest risk takers, and account for a disproportionate percentage of agricultural related injuries. Contributing to this behavior is their level of emotional and intellectual maturity, desire to ‘fit-in’ and/or please others, and a general lack of appreciation for the serious consequences of certain types of risk taking. In this activity, simple mouse and rat traps will be used to illustrate what a hazard is, why a hazard may be attractive, risk taking, and the potential consequences of risk taking.

Procedure:

1. Assemble different types and sizes of mouse and rat traps (preferably unused) and an uncooked hot dog. In some cases, such as the sticky board types, there is little or no threat to human safety. If a spring type trap is unset is also presents no real hazard.
2. Set the mouse trap. Once set, which generates no small amount of anxiety for some people, the potential of having a finger pinched is very real.
3. Fold a dollar bill and attach it to the bait holder portion of the mouse trap before setting the trap. You have now illustrated an attractive hazard which might lead someone to take a risk in retrieving the money, even with the knowledge that there may be painful consequences (That is why a mouse goes after the cheese).
4. Using the hot dog, try to remove the dollar bill without springing the trap.



If you replace the mouse trap with a rat trap and use a five-, ten- or 20-dollar bill, what happens to the level of the hazard and the willingness of participants to take the risk of retrieving the money, and the potential consequences? Are we not acting like mice going after the bait when we blindly take risks, even when we know the consequences? How does the mouse actually end up?

Ask the participants to identify activities that they have done that represent similar risk-taking activities with even far more serious consequences. These might include:

- crossing the road in front of oncoming traffic
- diving into water without knowing how deep the water is
- pulling a stick wedged into the discharge chute of a lawnmower without shutting off the mower
- trying to beat a train to the railroad crossing
- bypass starting a tractor without being on the seat
- taking a shortcut through a pasture with a bull in it