

## Farm safety - all terrain vehicles

All terrain vehicles (ATVs) are three or four wheeled motorbikes that are popular on farms because they are tough and versatile. However, they are also potentially very dangerous. The ATV is the number one cause of death on Victorian farms, responsible for nearly half of all regional deaths investigated by WorkSafe Victoria in 2002. Most injuries or deaths are caused by rider inexperience, lack of protective equipment and hazardous driving. People aged between 10 and 24 years are most likely to get hurt or killed riding an ATV. Despite its three or four wheels, the ATV isn't a stable vehicle -most injuries and deaths involve the bike rolling over the rider. ATVs are also known as 'ag bikes'.

### Causes of injury and death

Some of the ways in which an ATV can cause injury and death include:

- The ATV is carrying a passenger.
- Legs (of either rider or passenger) get caught by the tyres.
- The ATV back-flips or rolls over while negotiating a steep incline.
- The ATV hits an obstacle and rolls over.
- The rider is hit by a low-hanging obstacle, such as a branch.
- Unevenly distributed or poorly secured loads tip the ATV when in motion.
- The rider is unfamiliar with the controls.
- The rider doesn't know how to ride the ATV properly -for example, they aren't aware of the need to shift body weight to maintain the bike's centre of gravity.
- The rider is driving recklessly, such as trying to perform stunts.
- The ATV is poorly maintained, leading to mechanical failure of vital safety equipment such as brakes.

### Know your ATV

Inexperienced ATV riders assume that the three (or four) wheels offer better stability than a two-wheeled motorbike. This isn't the case -ATVs are prone to tipping and rolling. Reduce your risk of injury and death by knowing exactly what your ATV can and can't do. Suggestions include:

- Read the manual and pay particular attention to the safety instructions.
- Know the warning labels and observe them.
- Some ATV manufacturers provide a safety video with each purchase. Make sure that you and every other person who will be operating the ATV watches the video and understands the safety recommendations.
- Ask your ATV supplier for recommendations on ATV training courses. Alternatively, TAFE and agricultural colleges run ATV training courses. Make sure you and every other person who will be operating the ATV is properly trained.
- Practice riding the ATV until you feel confident -only then put the vehicle to its intended use.

### Safety suggestions -the ATV

Suggestions include:

- Use the ATV strictly according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- Leave all safety guards in place.
- If your ATV needs accessories, make sure to use the manufacturer's equipment or their recommendations.
- Fit accessories properly. Don't 'customise' the fit or you may compromise the ATV's stability.
- Strictly observe the load ratings.
- Keep the ATV in good mechanical repair.
- Perform a safety check each time before you ride.

## Safety suggestions -riders

Suggestions include:

- Treat the ATV as a piece of work machinery, not as a recreational vehicle. Don't attempt any type of 'stunt' riding, like performing 'wheelies'.
- Don't allow untrained people to ride the ATV.
- Caution children about the dangers and make sure they keep well clear of the ATV at all times.
- Never allow passengers on the ATV. A person on the back limits the rider's ability to shift weight appropriately.
- Always wear appropriate protective gear -for example, helmet (wear goggles if your helmet doesn't have a visor), boots, gloves, heavy-duty trousers and jacket.
- Ride at an appropriate speed at all times.
- Slow down before turning a corner or braking.

## Safety suggestions -terrain

Suggestions include:

- Whenever possible, ride on familiar tracks. Even then, think carefully about the position of any drains or other obstacles, the weather conditions, the nature of the surface and how fast you may be required to ride.
- Ride cautiously when riding the ATV on bitumen roads, as the smooth road surface may compromise control.
- Remember that liquids within a spray tank can cause sudden shifts to your ATV's centre of gravity when riding over uneven terrain. Take extra care.
- Assess the terrain carefully before choosing to ride on it. Steep slopes, particularly if the dirt is loose or wet, can cause the ATV to roll over.
- Watch the ground ahead for potential hazards. Riding into or over rocks, pipes or any other obstacle can cause an accident.
- If you're not confident that you can negotiate a particular stretch of terrain, don't attempt it -go another way or turn around.

## Where to get help

- ATV manufacturer
- TAFE or agricultural college (training courses)
- Department of Human Services Victoria, Rural and Regional Health Services Tel. (03) 9096 2846
- Commonwealth Regional Information Service Tel. 1800 026 222
- Farmsafe Australia Tel. (02) 6752 8210
- WorkCover Advisory Service Tel. 1800 136 089
- Victorian WorkCover Authority Tel. (03) 9641 1555

## Things to remember

- The all terrain vehicle (ATV) is the number one cause of death on Victorian farms.
- Make sure you and every other person who will be operating the ATV is properly trained.
- Reduce your risk of injury and death by familiarising yourself thoroughly with the capabilities of your ATV.

## Want to know more?

Go to More information for support groups, related links and references.

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DHS - Rural Health

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