

Farming is a dangerous job

Farming is one of the most dangerous occupations in Australia. Only one in 10 workplaces are farms, yet they account for one-quarter of all work-related deaths. Children under 15 years and adults over 65 years are more likely than others to be injured or killed. Males are more likely to be injured than females.

You can reduce the risk of farm injuries and illness at your farm. Accidents can be prevented through better farmer education, making sure equipment is well maintained and has adequate safety features, having safety procedures in place and training every worker and family member about potential dangers.

Common hazards

Every farm is different, but hazards common to most farms include:

- **Animals** – injuries inflicted by animals can include bites, kicks, crushing, ramming, trampling and transmissible diseases.
- **Chemicals** – pesticides and herbicides can cause injuries such as burns, respiratory illness or poisoning.
- **Confined spaces** – silos, water tanks and manure pits may contain unsafe atmospheres, which can cause poisoning or suffocation.
- **Electricity** – dangers include faulty switches, cords, machinery or overhead power lines.
- **Heights** – falls from ladders, rooftops, silos and windmills are a major cause of injury.
- **Machinery** – hazards include tractors without roll-over protection (ROP), chainsaws, augers and other machinery with unguarded moving parts.
- **Noise pollution** – noise from livestock, machinery and guns can affect your health.
- **Vehicles** – crashes or falls from motorbikes, all terrain vehicles (ATVs or quad bikes), tractors, utes and horses can result in injuries.
- **Water** – drowning can occur in dams, lakes, ponds, rivers, channels and creeks. Young children are particularly at risk.
- **Weather** – hazards include sunburn, heat stroke, dehydration and hypothermia.

Farm-related deaths in Australia

Approximately 100 people are unintentionally killed on Australian farms each year. This includes fatalities across the dairy, grain and pastoral industries. Between 2001 and 2004, the leading cause of farm-related death was the tractor, causing 75 deaths. Over the same period, 39 unintentional deaths were caused by quad bikes, 27 by farm utilities and cars, 22 by farm animals (11 of which were horse related), 13 by two-wheeled motorbikes, nine by drowning and seven were accidental firearm deaths.

Making your farm a safer workplace

Suggestions for making your farm a safer place to work include:

- Regularly walk around your farm and assess potential dangers.
- Consult with farm safety advisers from the Victorian WorkCover Authority – they may provide free consultations.
- Create a safe and contained play area for young children close to the house.
- Make sure everyone working on the farm is properly educated on farm risks and trained in first aid.
- Keep all equipment in good repair.
- Store dangerous items such as machinery and chemicals behind locked doors and remove keys.
- Devise ways to improve safety, such as fitting roll-over protection (ROPS) and seatbelts to tractors or replacing dangerous chemicals with less toxic varieties.
- Keep a log of injuries and near-misses to pinpoint areas for improvement.
- Consult with other workers and family members on how to improve safety.

- Write a safety plan together that includes ways to identify the hazards and minimise potential risks.
- Always use appropriate safety equipment, such as gloves, goggles or breathing apparatus.
- Make sure everyone understands and uses safety procedures, especially children.

Draw up an emergency plan

An emergency plan is vital. Some suggestions include:

- Ensure easy access to a suitable and well-stocked first aid kit.
- Make sure at least one person on the farm is trained in first aid.
- Keep emergency numbers and correct addresses next to the telephone.
- Plan routes to the nearest hospital.
- Regularly talk through your emergency plan with your family and other workers.
- Make sure your children understand what to do in an emergency.

Professional health and safety services

There are many organisations that can offer valuable advice on improving health and safety on your farm:

- WorkSafe Victoria has farm safety advisers and a comprehensive collection of publications covering health, safety and compensation issues.
- The Victorian Farm Safety Centre at the University of Ballarat runs a 'Managing Farm Safety' course.
- Farmsafe Australia and the Department of Primary Industries also offer information on safe operation of tractors and other farm machinery.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- In an emergency, always call triple zero (000) for an ambulance
- National Centre for Farmer Health Tel. (03) 5551 8533
- WorkSafe Victoria Tel. (03) 9641 1444 or 1800 136 089
- Victorian Farm Safety Centre Tel. (03) 5335 3717
- Department of Primary Industries Tel. 136 186
- Farmsafe Australia Tel. (02) 6752 8218

Things to remember

- The most dangerous workplaces in Australia are farms.
- Farm-related accidents are preventable if proper safety procedures are used by all workers at all times.
- Organisations such as WorkSafe Victoria can offer valuable advice on improving health and safety on your farm.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

National Centre for Farmer Health

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