

Farming is a dangerous job

The most dangerous workplaces in Australia are farms. Only one in 10 workplaces are farms, yet they account for one quarter of all work related deaths. Children under 15 and adults over 65 are more likely than others to be injured or killed. Accidents can be prevented if equipment is maintained, safety procedures are put in place, and every worker and family member is thoroughly trained and aware of potential dangers.

Common hazards

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

- **Animals** including injuries inflicted by the animal such as bites or kicks, manual handling injuries and transmissible diseases.
- **Chemicals** including pesticides and herbicides, which can cause injuries such as burns or poisoning.
- **Confined spaces** including silos, water tanks and manure pits that may contain unsafe atmospheres.
- **Electricity** including faulty switches or cords, or overhead power lines.
- **Heights** including ladders, rooftops, silos and windmills.
- **Machinery** including tractors without roll-over protection, and any machinery with unguarded moving parts.
- **Noise pollution** including noise from livestock and machinery.
- **Vehicles** including falls from motorbikes, tractors and horses.
- **Water** including dams, lakes, ponds, rivers and creeks, which pose the risk of drowning to young children.
- **Weather** including sunburn and heat stroke.

Statistics on the Victorian dairy, grain and pastoral industries

One of the leading causes of farm related deaths is the tractor. Death and injury statistics on the various types of farm industries in Victoria include:

- **Dairy industry** at least 25 deaths have occurred in the dairy industry since 1985. More than half of the deaths were caused by tractors. Other serious accidents included falls from motorcycles and getting caught by power take-off shafts.
- **Grain industry** at least 10 deaths have occurred in the grain industry since 1985. Half of these deaths were caused by tractors. Other causes included crush injuries and accidents with machinery such as chaff cutters and fertiliser spreaders. Grain augers and hay balers caused many serious injuries.
- **Pastoral industry** 38 deaths have occurred in the pastoral industry since 1985. More than half of these deaths were caused by machinery such as tractors.

Making your farm a safer workplace

Suggestions for making your farm a safer workplace include:

- Consult with farm safety advisors from the Victorian WorkCover Authority
- Create a safe and contained play area for young children close to the house.
- Make sure everyone working on the farm is properly trained.
- Keep all equipment in good repair.
- Store dangerous items such as machinery and chemicals behind locked doors.
- Regularly walk around your farm and assess potential dangers.
- 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 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 first aid kit
- Make sure at least one person on the farm is trained in first aid
- Keep emergency numbers next to the telephone
- Plan routes to the nearest hospital
- Regularly talk through your emergency plan
- Make sure your children understand what to do.

Professional health and safety services

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

- The Victorian WorkCover Authority has farm safety advisors and a comprehensive collection of publications covering health, safety and compensation issues.
- The Victorian Farm Safety Training Centre at the University of Ballarat runs the 'Managing Farm Safety' course.
- Victorian Farms Alliance offers information on safe operation of tractors and other farm machinery.
- Other organisations offering information and advice on safe machinery operation include the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, and FarmSafe Australia.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Victorian WorkCover Authority Tel. (03) 9641 1555
- Victorian Farm Safety Alliance Tel (03) 9207 5513
- Victorian Farm Safety Training Centre Tel. (03) 5334 3510
- Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tel. (03) 9637 8000
- FarmSafe Australia Tel. (02) 6752 8210
- In an emergency, always call 000 for an ambulance.

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 the Victorian WorkCover Authority can offer valuable advice on improving health and safety on your farm.

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

DHS - Rural Health

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