
Farm safety - risks and hazards

Summary

- 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.
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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 on farms. Males are more likely to be injured than females.

You can reduce the risk of farm injuries and illness at your farm by evaluating the risks and minimising them. Accidents can be prevented through better farmer and worker 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 transmission of certain infectious diseases such as giardia, salmonella, ringworm and leptospirosis
- **chemicals** – pesticides and herbicides can cause injuries such as burns, respiratory illness or poisoning
- **confined spaces** – such as silos, water tanks, milk vats 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 structures (ROPS), power take-off (PTO) shafts, chainsaws, augers, motorbikes and machinery with unguarded moving parts
- **noise pollution** – noise from livestock, machinery and guns can affect your hearing
- **vehicles** – crashes or falls from motorbikes, two-wheel and quad bikes, tractors, utes and horses can result in major injuries
- **water** – drowning can occur in as little as five centimetres of water. Dams, lakes, ponds, rivers, channels, tanks, drums and creeks are all hazards. Young children are particularly at risk
- **weather** – hazards include sunburn, heat stroke, dehydration and hypothermia.

Farm-related deaths in Australia

The number of people who are unintentionally killed on Australian farms accounts for 21 per cent of worker fatalities across all Australian industries. There are many more who suffer major injuries that require hospitalisation and significant time off work. Those older than 65 years accounted for 36 per cent of all deaths.

Between 2012 and 2016, there were 16.9 deaths on Australian farms per 100,000 workers, making 'agriculture, forestry and fishing' the most highly represented industry in Australia for workplace fatalities. This includes fatalities across the dairy, grain and pastoral industries and fisheries. Vehicle incidents (tractors, quad bikes and farm utilities) continue to be the leading cause of adult (greater than 15 years) deaths. Farm dams and other bodies of water (such as creeks and channels) continue to be the single largest cause of child deaths. Each year, five visitors or family members are killed on farms and four out of five are children under 10 years. The second most common cause of deaths for this group is falls from a vehicle (motorbikes, farm utilities and quad bikes).

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 and away from hazards.
- 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, firearms and chemicals behind locked doors and remove keys to a safe place.
- Find 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 hazards and minimise potential risks.
- Always use appropriate safety equipment, such as machinery guards and shields, helmets, gloves, goggles or breathing apparatus.
- Make sure everyone understands and uses safety procedures, especially children.
- If using four-wheel motorbikes, make sure you are using them in line with the recommendations – remember they are not all-terrain vehicles.

Draw up an emergency plan

An emergency plan is vital. Some suggestions include:

- Make sure there is 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. If you or someone else needs to call 000, they need the correct address.
- Plan routes to the nearest hospital – make sure it has an emergency department.
- 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, such as:

- WorkSafe Victoria has farm safety advisers and a comprehensive collection of publications covering health, safety and compensation issues.
- Farmsafe Australia offers the '**Managing Farm Safety (MFS™)**' training program, delivered by accredited instructors.
- Farmsafe Australia and the Department of Environment and Primary Industries also offer information on safe operation of tractors and other farm machinery.

Where to get help

- Your **GP (doctor)**
- In an emergency, always call triple zero (000)
- **National Centre for Farmer Health** Tel. **(03) 5551 8533**
- **WorkSafe Victoria** Tel. **1800 136 089** (advisory service) or **13 23 60** (for emergencies)
- Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning Tel. **136 186**
- **Farmsafe Australia** Tel. **(02) 6269 5622**

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