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Farm safety - risks and hazards

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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.

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 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 16 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 30 per cent of all deaths.

Between 2003 and 2011, there were a total of 356 non-intentional injury deaths on Australian farms. This includes fatalities across the dairy, grain and pastoral industries. 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 from 2003 to 2011 was 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.
- 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 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 training program – MFS™’, 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 doctor
- In an emergency, always call triple zero (000)
- National Centre for Farmer Health Tel. (03) 5551 8533
- WorkSafe Victoria Tel. (03) 9641 1444 or 1800 136 089
- Department of Environment and 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.

References

- WorkSafe Victoria, Victorian Government, Australia. [More information here.](#)

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Safety basics

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- [Babies and safety](#)
[Most injuries to babies do not occur by chance - many are predictable and largely preventable...](#)
- [Baby care - moving from cot to bed](#)
[Some children are unsettled the first few nights in a 'big bed'. Try to be patient, loving and reassuring...](#)
- [Baby furniture - safety tips](#)
[Even if your baby furniture meets every safety standard and recommendation, your child still needs close supervision...](#)
- [Bicycle safety and children](#)
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[Most hot tap water scald injuries to children happen in the bathroom...](#)
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- [Playgrounds and child safety](#)
[Play environments can be safe and beneficial for your child. With proper planning, you can make sure your child gets plenty of playtime activity...](#)
- [Poisoning and child safety](#)
[Call the Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26 immediately if you suspect your child has been poisoned or given the wrong medicine or the wrong dose of medicine...](#)
- [Road and traffic safety for children](#)
[As they grow and develop, and with the help of adults, children become increasingly aware of how they can manage their own safety, and become safer road users...](#)

- [Scooters and child safety](#)

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- [Water safety for children](#)

[Toddlers are most at risk of drowning because they are mobile and curious but don't understand the danger of water...](#)

Safety in and around the home

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[Children should always be closely supervised near animals and taught how to behave safely around pets...](#)

- [Asbestos in the home](#)

[Asbestos fibres breathed into the lungs can cause a range of health problems including lung cancer and mesothelioma...](#)

- [Chemicals in the home](#)

[Learn how to safely store and dispose of household chemicals, and how to respond when a person is poisoned...](#)

- [Electric shock](#)

[Always disconnect the power supply before trying to help a victim of electric shock...](#)

- [Greywater - recycling water at home](#)

[When handled properly, greywater can be safely reused for the garden...](#)

- [Groundwater](#)

[Groundwater quality varies across Victoria; in some areas, groundwater is not suitable for use...](#)

- [Ladder safety matters – Mick \(video\)](#)

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- [Ladder safety matters – Nick \(video\)](#)

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[Injuries associated with ladder falls have been steadily increasing in Australia, especially among men aged 60 years and older doing work in and around the home...](#)

- [Ladder Safety – Nick's story](#)

[Injuries associated with ladder falls have been steadily increasing in Australia, especially among men aged 60 years and older doing work in and around the home...](#)

- [Ladder Safety – Paul's story](#)

[Paul was sanding the exterior of his house when he overreached and fell more than two metres from his ladder...](#)

- [Ladders Safety Matters - Paul \(video\)](#)

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- [Medicines - safety issues](#)

[Make sure your doctor knows about every medicine you take, including vitamins...](#)

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[Falls are a major cause of injury for older people. Find out how you can prevent falls around your home...](#)

- [Pest control in the home](#)

[If you use pesticides to control pests around the house, make sure you use as little as possible...](#)

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[Check your swimming pool regularly to make sure the water is safe for swimming...](#)

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[There are many ways to improve home safety for people whose vision is deteriorating...](#)
- [Water quality in tanks, bores and dams](#)
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[There is no such thing as a safe solarium tan...](#)

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- [Heat stress and heat-related illness](#)
[Heat kills more Australians than any natural disaster. Find out how you can treat and prevent heat-related illness...](#)
- [Heat stress and older people](#)
[People aged 65 years and over are at increased risk of heat-related illnesses and need special care in hot weather...](#)
- [Heat stress – preventing heatstroke](#)
[Heatstroke is a life-threatening emergency that can be avoided by following simple prevention measures...](#)
- [Hot weather and child safety](#)
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[Drinking untreated water, such as creek water, bore water and sometimes even rainwater can lead to illnesses including gastroenteritis...](#)
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[Safe driving is up to every individual on the road. You can be a safe driver by being alert and ready to take action at any time...](#)

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[You can reduce your risk of being mugged or robbed while travelling by taking a few simple precautions...](#)

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[When returning to a flood-affected area, remember that wild animals, including rats, mice, snakes or spiders, may be trapped in your home, shed or garden...](#)

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[When returning to your home after a flood, take precautions to reduce the possibility of injury, illness or disease...](#)

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[Houses, sheds and other buildings or structures burnt in a bushfire can leave potential health hazards...](#)

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[Being prepared for a bushfire helps you cope better in an emergency...](#)

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[Bushfire smoke can reduce air quality in rural and urban areas, and may affect people's health...](#)

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[You and your family should work out an emergency plan in case of flood...](#)

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[Bushfire smoke can reduce air quality in rural and urban areas, and may affect people's health. Planned burns are an important part of reducing the risk of bushfires...](#)

- [Talking to children about bushfire risk](#)

[Children can be affected by information regarding bushfire risk and they may become concerned about issues of safety. Talking to children openly in a way that suits their age, while also involving...](#)

- [Urban flash floods - FAQs](#)

[Urban flash flooding can happen quickly and without warning. Heavy rain causes runoff to collect in dips, car parks and roads, and there is a risk of contamination, injury and disease...](#)

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[When asbestos fibres become airborne, people working with asbestos may inhale particles which remain in their lungs...](#)

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[Low-level exposure to cadmium over a long period of time may cause health effects because cadmium can accumulate in the body...](#)

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[Using a computer can contribute to problems of the muscles and joints, eyestrain and overuse injuries of the arms, wrists and hands...](#)

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[Wearing eye protection appropriate for the task can significantly reduce the risk of injury...](#)

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[Q fever is caused by a micro-organism that can be carried by cattle, sheep and goats...](#)

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[Around 60 per cent of people killed in confined spaces were trying to rescue someone else...](#)

- [Workplace safety - coping with a critical incident](#)

[Stress responses can develop over time after trauma, and support may be required by some workers or groups...](#)

- [Workplace safety - dangerous goods](#)

[Dangerous goods are objects or substances that are potentially harmful to people or the environment, such as explosives or chemicals...](#)

- [Workplace safety - hazardous substances](#)

[A hazardous substance can be inhaled, splashed onto the skin or eyes, or swallowed...](#)

- [Workplace safety - infection control](#)

[The spread of many pathogens in the workplace can be prevented with regular hand washing...](#)

- [Workplace safety - manual handling injuries](#)

[A person can be injured when handling objects in a variety of ways including pulling, pushing, holding or restraining...](#)

- [Workplace safety - noise pollution](#)

[There are many ways to reduce exposure to excessive noise in the workplace...](#)

- [Workplace safety - overuse injuries](#)

[Occupational overuse syndrome, also known as RSI, is caused by repetitive movements or awkward postures...](#)

Farm safety

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[Sprayed chemicals can drift over neighbouring properties or water sources, and can affect human health, animals or the environment...](#)

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