
Farm safety – sheep and shearing

Summary

- Handling sheep can cause a variety of manual injuries, ranging from strains and sprains through to broken bones.
 - Reducing the risk of manual-handling injuries includes attention to posture, correct lifting techniques and maintaining fitness.
 - Walk through all sheep-handling areas and look for hazards, then make the necessary changes to improve safety.
 - Inexperienced workers are at greater risk of injury, so make sure they are thoroughly trained.
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Handling sheep can cause a variety of manual injuries, ranging from strains and sprains through to degenerative joint and muscle damage, and broken bones. And badly designed shearing sheds and yards can be dangerous.

Make your farm a safe working environment by identifying potential hazards and modifying the layout, equipment and safety practices of your operation. This will ensure that workers are less likely to injure themselves and your sheep.

Inexperienced or unfit workers, or workers aged over 65 years, are more likely to injure themselves, so it is important to train your staff thoroughly about safe handling. Encourage them to maintain their fitness and wellbeing by exercising and eating well, and working within their physical capabilities

Sheep handling – farm risk assessment

You can assess potential sheep handling risks in many ways:

- Walk through all sheep-handling areas and look for hazards.
- Consult with safety advisers from WorkSafe Victoria.
- Read over injury records to pinpoint recurring dangers.
- Talk over safety issues with other sheep handlers.
- Remember that inexperienced or unfit workers, and workers aged over 65, are at greater risk of manual-handling injuries.

Preventing manual handling injuries on sheep farms

You can reduce the risk of manual-handling injuries in many ways. Encourage workers to:

- Remain hydrated by drinking plenty of non-alcoholic and non-caffeinated fluids. Water is the best option.
 - Exercise regularly to improve and maintain fitness, strength and stamina.
 - Look after their health.
 - Eat a well-balanced diet – always provide healthy, nutritious meal options if you are required to feed workers.
 - Stretch and warm up with gentle exercises before shearing, and cool down afterwards with slow, continuous stretches. (A doctor or physical therapist can provide advice about safe stretching to avoid further injury.)
 - Use the free Farming Fit videos, **Part 1** and **Part 2**, to maintain fitness. Available from the **National Centre for Farmer Health**.
 - Take regular breaks to alleviate fatigue.
 - When handling a sheep, keep the animal close to their body and avoid having to lift the animal. If required to lift, use the proper technique by keeping their back straight, feet shoulder width apart and lift with their thigh muscles.
 - Always get help when lifting heavy loads, or use a hoist.
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As an employer:

- Protect your workers' backs by paying attention to **good workplace and equipment design** (ergonomics), posture and using supportive braces.
- Make sure yards and handling areas are designed to minimise the handling and lifting of sheep.
- Only ask workers to perform a task if you are confident they can handle it.

Sheep handling – a safer working environment

General suggestions for improving the safety of sheep handling include:

- Use non-slip surfaces on all tracks and walkways.
- Design a yard layout that allows sheep to move freely.
- Fit protective coverings (shade and shelter) to working and drafting races.
- Build yards on inclines rather than flat ground as they tend to drain better and sheep prefer running up a slight incline.
- Ensure adequate and even lighting.
- Regularly maintain all equipment and make sure appropriate safety guards are used.
- Be aware of high noise levels – where possible, use/provide hearing protection, choose quieter equipment, install mufflers and noise covers, place equipment away from workers and limit the volume of radios and music players.
- Ensure that all workers use personal protective equipment (PPE) such as goggles, ear muffs and gloves when grinding cutters.
- Use and store chemicals correctly according to the manufacturers' instructions.
- Use a cradle when marking or handling lambs.
- Understand sheep diseases and promptly treat any animal with symptoms.
- Be aware that animals can transmit diseases to humans via saliva, urine or contact with skin or wounds.
- Practice good personal hygiene. Always wash your hands before eating and after handling sheep.

Using farm chemicals safely

When jetting, dipping, drenching or treating for fly strike, the following safety procedures should be observed:

- Use chemicals correctly according to the manufacturers' instructions. Make sure you have read the labels and Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) for the product being used.
- Ensure that all workers use safety equipment recommended on the MSDS, such as skin, ear and eye protection and a respirator.
- Keep all equipment in good repair and replace faulty parts.
- Immediately see your doctor if you experience headaches, nausea, diarrhoea or other ill effects after using chemicals.
- Report any adverse events to the **Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA)**.

Mustering sheep

Safety suggestions for mustering sheep include:

- Plan the muster in advance and talk the plan through with your workers.
- Assume that every ram will act aggressively and unpredictably.
- Don't rush the muster – a calm approach results in a calmer mob.
- Use sheep dogs rather than horses or motorbike riders to control the mob.
- Further information about safety when mustering sheep is available [here](#).

Safety issues in the shearing shed

You can make your shearing shed a safer environment for you and your workers in the following ways:

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- Make sure the shed is well ventilated and well lit.
- Ensure all guards are on all shearing machinery.
- Space your workers out to avoid clashing of downtubes.
- Use electric motors on wool presses to reduce noise pollution.
- **Regularly maintain all equipment** and keep in good repair with safety equipment in place.
- Make sure that emergency stop buttons are easily reached.
- Keep all walkways free from obstructions
- Ensure adequate and even lighting.
- Make sure catching pen floors are dry and non-slip.
- Keep other workers, children and dogs out of the shed.
- Discuss with your veterinarian the ability to sedate your rams when shearing.
- Keep a stocked and up-to-date first aid kit in a readily accessible place.
- Regularly check and maintain fire-fighting equipment, such as extinguishers.
- **Thoroughly train new workers and children** in shearing shed safety.
Further information about shearing shed safety is available [here](#) and [here](#).

Draw up a farm 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 with 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.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- In an emergency, always call triple zero (000) for an ambulance– know your correct address
- National Centre for Farmer Health Tel. (03) 5551 8533
- WorkSafe Victoria Tel. (03) 9641 1444 or 1800 136 089
- **SafeWork Australia**
- **Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning** Tel. 136 186
- Farmsafe Australia Tel. (02) 6752 8218
- **SaferFarms.org.nz** – Safe sheep handling

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

National Centre for Farmer Health

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