

Risk of injury in agriculture a serious concern

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Workers in agriculture are at high risk of injury, with the rate of workplace accidents in agriculture almost double that across all industries, according to 2008-09 data from Safe Work Australia.

Safe Work Australia is an Australian Government statutory agency with responsibility for workers' compensation arrangements and to improve work health and safety across Australia.

A Safe Work Australia spokesperson said that in 2008-2009 there were 3,265 workers' compensation claims in the agricultural industry for serious work-related injuries or illnesses resulting in one or more weeks off work. This figure does not include the 50% of agricultural workers, including farmers, who are self-employed and so are not covered by workers' compensation. Some of the claims related to incidents causing a death, permanent incapacity or temporary incapacity.

"This is a rate of 25 claims per 1,000 employees," the spokesperson said. "While there has been some improvement in the agricultural industry in recent years, there is still more to be done to improve work health and safety practices and reduce risks for workers."

In the six years to June 2009, 271 agricultural workers were killed at work. Many of these were self-employed farmers.

Effective management of work health and safety not only ensures a safer workplace for Australian workers, but has a very significant effect on performance and productivity. Total economic cost of work-related injuries and illness to Australia's economy is estimated at \$57.5 billion; almost 6% of Australia's Gross Domestic Product.

"Workplaces that strive to improve work health and safety create a safer working environment, which benefits owners and workers, their families and communities and the wider Australian economy," the spokesperson said.

"Farms with good work health and safety practices face fewer workplace injuries and, where they employ workers, benefit from higher retention rates and an enhanced ability to attract employees."

In 2005, the agriculture, forestry and fisheries industry was included as a priority sector in the *National Occupational Health and Safety 2002-2012 Strategy*. This National Strategy recognises that good work health and safety practice provides a safer work environment and improves worker morale and productivity. According to 2008-2009 data, the number of workplace related injuries in the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sector has fallen 11% since 2005.

The current National Strategy will conclude next year and be replaced with the *National Work Health and Safety Strategy 2012-2022*.

Safe Work Australia is a partnership involving governments, unions and industry who are working together to reduce death, injury and disease in the workplace. Safe Work Australia is jointly funded by the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments and is facilitated through the *Intergovernmental Agreement for Regulatory and Operational Reform in Occupational Health and Safety* signed in July 2008.



FITTING ROLL BARS TO TRACTORS HAS HELPED REDUCE THE NUMBER OF TRACTOR-RELATED FATALITIES BY MORE THAN HALF IN THE PAST 20 YEARS.

For further information on Safe Work Australia and information included in this article, visit www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au.



TRACTOR FATALITIES DECREASE

The number of workers killed in tractor-related incidents has fallen from 102 to 65 a year over the past 15 years.

The figures are contained in a Safe Work Australia study; *Fatalities due to working with tractors, Australia, 2003-04 to 2006-07*.

The decrease in fatalities is due largely to a reduction in the number of workers killed due to a tractor rollover, which decreased from 40 to 17 a year in the 15 years to 2006-07.

"This is most likely due to the introduction of legislation requiring all tractors built after 1981 to be fitted with a rollover protection structure," a Safe Work Australia spokesperson said. "Most of the rollover deaths still occurring involve tractors built before this time and being used by self-employed workers."

"Being run over by a tractor now accounts for the greatest number of tractor-related deaths each year, with 25 of the 65 fatalities in the study attributed to tractor crush injuries. Workers leaving tractors unattended without putting the brakes on properly accounted for many of these deaths."

"The study also identified that 40% of the workers killed while using a tractor were aged 65 years or over. Self-employed workers in the agriculture sector were most at risk, accounting for 42 of the 62 deaths. Employment data shows that half of the workers in this sector are self-employed," the spokesperson said.