

Work environment – Rural safety

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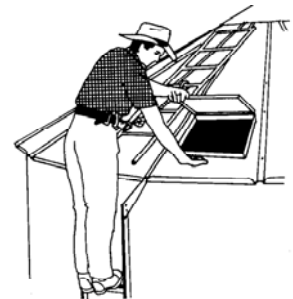
Rural hazards >

This bulletin outlines some simple safety guidelines for those working in the rural industry and is one of a series on Rural Industry safety.

Some operations, equipment, machinery and situations that are particular to the rural industry need special attention.

Tractors

Tractors are involved in a number of fatalities and serious injuries each year. Operating a tractor correctly involves following the manufacturer's instructions. A tractor should be fitted with a roll-over protective structure (ROPS) to protect the operator. Seat belts should be worn, but only where a ROPS is fitted. Where it is impossible to fit a ROPS which meets the requirements of the applicable Australian Standard, the tractor should not be operated where it can roll. Passengers, especially children, should not be carried unless a passenger seat with a seat belt is fitted to the tractor and it is preferably within a cabin protected by a ROPS.



Hearing protection, such as ear muffs or plugs, needs to be worn to avoid noise-induced hearing loss. Guards including the PTO guard, must be kept in place and the self-starter should only be operated from the driving position. Dismount from a tractor with care, jumping from the tractor may cause back injury.

Do not start tractors from the ground or attempt to climb back on, or step off, a moving tractor.

Working platforms

Working platforms are used in a number of operations around farm buildings and orchards. Scaffolding and forklift cages provide a safe place to work at heights. Working platforms must be secure to prevent collapse. Guard rails should be provided where a person could fall more than two metres.

Silos

Suggested correct procedures for silo work include:

- use a safety harness when working on a silo;
- when inside a silo, have an observer standing by outside, and be aware that the atmosphere inside may be oxygen deficient;
- upon finishing work on a silo, remove ladders so no unauthorised people, particularly children, can access the silo;
- make sure the auger drive train and rotating screw are properly guarded;
- before filling the silo, check the capacity for different grains so that it is not overloaded.

Breathing equipment will be needed if the air inside a silo is oxygen deficient.

putting safety first >



Manure pits

Toxic gases in manure pits can be fatal if the build-up is high enough. Be aware that these gases - ammonia, methane, carbon dioxide and hydrogen sulphide - may be present. At low concentrations hydrogen sulphide smells like rotten eggs, but at higher more lethal concentrations, it is odourless. At these levels it causes rapid loss of consciousness and death. Adequate precautions should be taken where these gases may be present.

Monitor yourself carefully and watch for signs of exposure such as a dry cough or rapid impairment of judgement. Use correct confined-space procedures:

- work in a well ventilated area;
- wear a safety harness and ensure that you have an external observer;
- monitor the gases present.

Never trust your senses to determine if the air is safe - you cannot see or smell many dangerous gases.

Overhead power lines

Serious injury can result from an irrigation pipe, auger or tip truck touching a power line. A flash may occur from equipment simply being close to a line. Take extra care around power lines, and never load or unload animals or other produce under power lines.

Vehicles and other equipment

Never use makeshift lifting gear when working on farm vehicles. Use a wide-based jack and make sure its lifting capacity is adequate for the load. If you jack up a tractor, block it for extra support. Never rely solely on the tractor hydraulics when working under raised equipment. Before removing a tyre from the rim, ensure that all the air has been released. Split rims can be especially dangerous. Inflate tyres in a cage for safety.

Chain saws are dangerous if not used in accordance with manufacturer's instructions. Equipment deteriorates very quickly if everyday maintenance is not carried out. Sharpen blades, tighten screws and belts, and be alert for the need for minor repairs.

Animals

Horses and other animals can cause serious injury. Handling animals may involve drenching, dipping, tagging, branding and shearing. Animals can give a swift, hard kick, so watch their behaviour, respect their size and strength and, where possible, don't stand behind them.

Animals can also transmit diseases. Avoid contact with their urine, blood and saliva by wearing the correct personal protective equipment.

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