



Central Registry
File No P140

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24 November 2003



Ms Kristen Murray
Executive Officer
Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee
Level 8
35 Spring Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Dear Kristen

Parliamentary Inquiry – Death and Injury on Victorian Farms

I acknowledge receipt of your letter of 29 October 2003 inviting submissions into the parliamentary inquiry into death and injury on Victorian farms.

I am pleased to provide you with the following information drawn up by Mr Don Harkins, one of the Institute's specialists in occupational health and safety, who has been involved in OH&S training with Sunraysia Institute of TAFE for many years.

1. The main causes of fatality and injury on Victorian farms and other primary industries compared to other jurisdictions:

- Farmers and their employees often work alone without other workers to alert them of dangers. Teamwork and consultation are key factors to safe work practices and this is often missing for the farmer.
- Farmers working alone tend to take short-cuts.
- Farmers do not participate in OH&S training programs and are not aware of the requirements.
- There are often no documented Standard Operating Procedures.
- Some machinery is used for only a short period each year. Operators are not familiar with the machines and forget the hazards that need controlling.
- Some tasks are undertaken for long hours e.g. after rain, farmers may operate machinery around-the-clock resulting in fatigue.
- There is often no staffing structure to deal with safety.

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2. The matter and type of these injuries compared with other industries and jurisdictions:

- Manual handling injuries due to the nature of many tasks.
- Severe injuries (broken bones, lacerations, soft tissue, fatalities) with operators being exposed to rotating Power Take-Off shafts.
- Health problems due to exposure to dusts and farm chemicals.

3. Current programs and initiatives designed to improve occupational health & safety on Victorian farms:

- There are many good programs available and there are FarmBis subsidies for farmers to participate but they will not attend. Our Institute offers a range of OH&S training programs which are suitable for farmers and they attract participants from a broad range of businesses and industries but rarely does anyone from the farming industry attend.

4. Any impediments to sustaining improvements in farm safety:

- Most farmers have little knowledge of occupational health & safety and are reluctant to attend training sessions. Suitable training is available at low cost to farmers.

5. The financial and social cost of death and injury on Victorian farms:

- The cost of serious injury is enormous. The financial costs include medical accounts, engaging and training replacement workers, increase in insurance premiums, rehabilitation, etc.

The social costs include failure to carry out normal home duties, inability to participate in sport, inability to join in the usual social events. Injured people generally feel unwanted by their workmates.

Death of a farmer introduces much more severe costs in every way as well as the grief that is suffered for the years to follow.

6. The need for further strategies to reduce the incidence of injury and fatality on Victorian farms, what form the strategy should take and whether they are best developed by government agencies, industry bodies, worker representatives or a combination of these. In particular the committee should consider the creation of further codes of practice or education and training programs:

- Occupational health and safety training should be made compulsory for farmers in the same way that it is compulsory for construction workers.
- Farmers should be required to identify and document the hazards on their farm.

- Standard Operating Procedures should be developed for all tasks that present a risk of injury on the farm.
- Certificates/Licences should be required for the operation of chainsaws and other items of farm equipment.
- So long as the strategies are developed and delivered by competent people, it is not necessary for particular agencies or bodies to be involved. However, control of the system needs to be with one body to ensure that standards are maintained throughout the industry.
- Additional codes of practice would have little effect. There is currently a good range of information and materials available but these are rarely read or followed by farmers.
- Use of the internet is not suitable at this stage for training of farmers. They require face-to-face contact with a presenter and interaction with a group of farmers – preferably on a farm where the farmers can see actual hazards identified assessed and controlled.

If you require further detailed information, do not hesitate to contact Mr Don Harkins on (03) 5022 3715.

Yours sincerely



DR RON WILD
Chief Executive Officer

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