

Ben Hardman, Member for Seymour. PO Box 145, Seymour. Victoria 3661.

Email: benedict.hardman@parliament.vic.gov.au

Submission to Parliamentary Committee on Farm Safety

I'd like to make the following points in respect of the Committee's inquiry into ways of improving farm safety and reducing the human and financial costs of workplace illness, injury and death to the rural sector in particular and the Victorian community in general.

1. To the farmer, his farm is a workplace. To the farmer's family, the farm is a home. To workers employed and housed on a farm, the farm is both workplace and home. For visitors to the property who may be there for any one of hundreds of reasons, the farm is as benign or dangerous as their life experience presents it to them.
In a well-run city workplace of similar capital investment, you will find people fitting into two distinct groups;
 - a) employees (including managers) who have been inducted into the site at the end of a process that identified hazards, assessed and ranked risks and implemented measures to eliminate or reduce the risks to workplace Health & Safety. The process is formalised and documented. Residual risks are mitigated by the provision of Personal Protective Equipment and by the writing of detailed work procedures, supported by training and the monitoring of performance and
 - b) people who are visitors to the site, to whom a special duty of care is owed because resources are not available to provide a site safety induction to the same standard as that given to employees.At this workplace, employees would face an exhaustive and multi-layered site and process safety induction program before commencing work. Similarly, visitors would face a formal, but less detailed site induction before setting foot beyond the Reception Desk. A city employer might even develop a Site Safety Policy that demands a visitor be accompanied by an employee at all times while on the premises.
On a farm, there may be an assumption that each member of the farmer's family is aware of the hazards that abound in these places. Assumptions such as this serve to illustrate the 'blurring' that characterises the boundary between the farm as a family home and the farm as a workplace.
2. Typically, a farmer is a practical, pragmatic person who will spend \$100,000 on a new piece of machinery but would laugh at a proposal to engage a 'Safety Consultant' to tell him how to 'do his job' in a business that may well have been in the family for generations.
3. Enforcement by a statutory authority would also be strenuously opposed by farmers - even if the resources were available to inspect every farm in the state. Recent editorial in the Weekly Times newspaper highlights the perception that the farming sector is beset by 'Red Tape' and another shiny bum in a uniform is the last thing the farmer wants to see appear at his gate. The inspectorate is also

- constrained to the extent they can't provide practical advice on ways to resolve particular issues.
4. The modern farmer is an astute person who will recognise the value of a technical resource made available as long as it is delivered via a credible medium. The proposal to employ Farm Safety Officers at the Local Government level provides an opportunity to not only make available a resource, but to advance specific projects so long as some control is exercised by a centralised body. A strategic approach to common farm safety issues is able to be undertaken by a group of professionals who are 'in step'. Farm Safety Officers attached to Local Government would need to find a balance between local knowledge and skills as a safety professional together with the ability to communicate to groups and individuals who may range anywhere between receptive and hostile. By using a skilled facilitator, the cause of farm safety can be advanced simply by stimulating debate on safety issues in a forum where opinions are able to be freely expressed.
 5. In many ways, smaller rural communities provide a ready-made audience into which new ideas can be introduced. Social interaction through such groups as the cricket club, the football club, the CWA, Landcare Group, CFA, SES, church groups and many more means that opportunities for intersection of an individual's social circle with others are many. The very size of rural communities means that community members are generally sensitive to the regard in which they are held by their peers. Because of this, I am confident that some form of Farm Safety Accreditation Scheme could succeed. Such a scheme would require support from key stakeholders in the sector. I can envisage an instantly identifiable logo - like the 5 Ticks symbol used by Standards Australia to indicate the holder has been independently certified against an International Standard. Such a logo, reproduced on the farm gate, vehicles and stationery declares to those who see it "By displaying this logo, I have been recognised as having done the work to make my farm safer and I have been audited against a standard." Accreditation against a standard may involve a farmer becoming familiar with basic Risk Assessment techniques and include the significant areas of ;
 - Mobile plant, vehicles and equipment including implements and accessories,
 - Fixed plant and equipment like pumps, motors, windmills, electric fences, etc.,
 - Tools and workshop,
 - Working with livestock,
 - Dangerous Goods and other hazardous materials,
 - The farm emergency management plan and
 - Exposure to specific risks associated with Work at Heights, Confined Spaces etc.
 6. Notwithstanding the work done at the University of Ballarat, efforts made to date by organisations such as WorkSafe, VFF, Farmsafe, Agsafe (to name just a few), have for the most part been 'stand alone' programs or projects. An opportunity exists to identify all the Stakeholders including elements of the Trade Union movement as well as major industrial suppliers to the sector and bring them together in a series of workshops - similar to the strategy workshop held by the Transport & Storage division of WorkSafe at the Preston Office during 2002. I had the privilege of participating in that process, guided by a facilitator who

challenged those present to project their minds forward and conjure up some 'Utopian' headlines celebrating current OH&S practice in the Transport & Storage sector of the future - a 'wish list' for industry people devoted to OH&S. The group then devised strategies and plotted their development along a Gant Chart towards their realization as proclaimed by the headlines. Once embraced by a strategic plan, individual projects can be shaped and timed to appear as a seamless continuum. When pressure applied from one direction is relaxed, it simply reappears from another direction using a slightly different angle a kind of 'marketing strategy' for farm safety. Coupled with an accreditation program, the angles are numerous. From a competition amongst school kids to design a logo to the development of farmers as auditors for their peers there are roles for all the stakeholders. Farmers have egos but their horizons are generally closer than their city counterparts. Recognition by their peers can count for much more in a rural community than the prospect of a small reduction in an insurance premium linked to safety accreditation.

My work is divided between duties as National Safety Coordinator for Australia's largest, privately-owned Transport and Logistics company and operating a property in South Gippsland engaged in beef cattle production. I am both involved and interested in Farm Safety and would welcome the opportunity to participate in any program aimed at improving on-farm safety performance.

Thank you for considering this submission.

David Comtesse.

2 Luntar Road
Oakleigh South, 3167
Ph: 95793398
Mob: 0409 258442
E-mail: comtesse@tpg.com.au

'Fairlawn'
860 Buffalo Stony Creek Road
Stony Creek, 3957