RURAL AND REGIONAL SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into cause of fatality and injury on Victorian farms

Modewarre – 9 March 2004

Members
Mr M. P. Crutchfield
Mr B. P. Hardman
Mr C. Ingram
Mr J. M. McQuilten

Mr R. G. Mitchell
Dr D. V. Napthine
Mr P. L. Walsh

Chair: Mr B. P. Hardman
Deputy Chair: Mr C. Ingram

Staff
Executive Officer: Ms K. Murray
Research Officer: Dr V. Koops

Witness

Mr B. Winter.
Mr WINTER — My name is Barry Winter, I live in the region at 50 Connies Lane, Modewarre. I breed Murray Grey cattle. I am president of the Murray Grey Beef Cattle Society in Geelong. I am an inventor and carpenter. I invented this anti-tip rollover protection for four-wheel motorbikes, and the stuff was given to Ian Trezise a couple of years ago. I have given a photo to Mr Hardman. One of these meetings was going to be called some time ago, but we never ever got around to doing it. I am rather surprised, after being involved with a very large and wealthy company in Geelong for about 14 years in occupational health and safety, that something like four-wheel motor bikes would ever have been allowed to go the way it has gone. People have been killed every year on those motorbikes. I call them motorbikes because they are not all-terrain vehicles; they tip over on flat ground. I have seen them demonstrated by Honda at Colac at one of the meetings they have every year down there. They run a very good safety meeting at Colac; they are running a very good safety program down there.

My view of these four-wheel motorbikes is that the wheel base is too narrow and the centre of gravity is too high, so that is why they tip over. This anti-tip rollover protection gear is not exactly nice looking, but if it is going to save someone’s life either change the design of the bikes or put rollover protection on them. Once you get over about 10 or 15 kilometres an hour anything is likely to happen. I know people who have been driving them for years. There is a fellow up the back here who has been driving them and never, ever got hurt because they do not go too fast. There are three-wheel motorbikes that used to be around. In fact there is a fellow not far from this place who rides a three-wheel motorbike across a paddock far too fast. I saw him.

In regard to rollover protection on tractors, I saw a bloke on Sunday while I was going over to see my daughter at Bannockburn. He was going along the side of the road doing some grading in an old Ferguson tractor with a blade on the back and no rollover protection. I am one of those volunteers for Worksafe, and I used to have quite a bit to do with Eric Young. We all know that unfortunately he passed away last year. Eric used to give me all the details of the fatalities. He used to have them all typed and sent to me because I do the safety report at our Murray Grey meetings in Geelong. People like to know. I have been doing it for about five years. When we first started off doing safety reports people said, ‘Here we go again’ sort of thing. But now I cannot get the stuff that I want, and people want to know why we cannot get this stuff. I believe if we are to be fair dinkum about safety every rural organisation must have on the agenda a safety report to keep people up to date with what is going on. Hopefully there are not going to be any fatalities at all, but we do kill about 14 people a year.

I also wanted the number of serious accidents, because lots of people can get seriously hurt and never, ever work again. We do not get that sort of stuff, but we do need to get it. Every rural organisation should discuss these things. With the large company that I worked for, in 40 years there has never been a fatality on site. A couple of contractors were killed, and that was pretty bad. They were electrocuted, but they have been the only people. What used to happen is that if something was going to be used it was always necessary to see how it was going to work and everyone had a chance to put in and to see. They would say, ‘I do not like this or that. Let us change the system and let us change the equipment we are using, because we just cannot keep doing what we are doing’. I am surprised that the government has allowed this to go on as long as it has gone on.

Last year I got the report from Len Woodfine about all the fatalities and injuries that went on for the last 10 years. It is quite frightening if you look at it — you can easily get hold of it from Worksafe — and we need to do something about it. We need to look at the contributing factors to any accident.
Those contributing factors have to be fixed. It is no good just using something and continuing to kill people, like we are doing, and think it is all going to go away. It is not going to go away. You do not buy an electric saw without a guard on it and say, ‘Look, all you’ve got to do is hang onto it. When the blade stops you can put it down or put it on a piece of timber’. People would cut their legs, their feet, or whatever, off. We are using dangerous equipment. It is just not acceptable.

Dr NAPTHINE — A number of expert witnesses have advised us that putting rollover protection on ATVs or four-wheel motorbikes, or whatever you want to call them, would be counterproductive until or unless belts and helmets are necessary — that they can actually cause more problems than the people they save. Why would yours be different from that?

Mr WINTER — Firstly, it has an outrigger on the front and one on the back. You cannot tip it over forwards or backwards and you cannot roll it over. Helmets would be an essential part of it. I am wearing safety glasses. That is from years of working in occupational health and safety. I would not do anything without safety glasses because if you lose your eyesight you might as well be dead.

A lot of people do not use glasses, face masks, hearing protection, boots, or whatever. They just keep going along, saying, ‘It’s never going to happen to me’. About two years ago a fellow died not far from here. He used to own a factory where they did chrome plating, electroplating and all that sort of stuff. He was a helluva nice bloke. The person on the other side of Geelong who does some powder coating for me, who is the manager — because I do steel farm fencing systems — told me today that the fellow who was running the place for him would be dead in two months. He wears no glasses, no hearing protection, no face masks. They sandblast things. I think people at Worksafe really have to get off their backsides and get around and stop some of these people doing the silly things that they are doing. You just cannot keep breathing in all that muck. You just cannot keep doing it because eventually it will catch up with you. They say, ‘It’ll never happen to me’, but it does happen.

When I got up on Sunday morning or yesterday morning I heard on the ABC that two people had been killed on farms. A little bloke was killed in South Australia. He was on a trailer that had a load or tank of water that tipped the trailer over and killed him. There was a fellow down in Orbost in Gippsland who is tipped a tractor over and killed himself. That happened in 24 hours.

I have seen some terrible reports from Eric. I used to go and see Eric and sit in the office and discuss things. It is horrifying. I will mention just a couple of things that have happened in this region. A couple of years ago a fellow was digging a hole — he had dug a great hole around. Another fellow down in Gippsland was driving around in his tractor — a bloke from Melbourne who thought he could run a small farm — and he was checking the mower at the back. The mower caught on a post, tipped the wheel over, he fell onto the ground, and the mower went over the top of him. His wife found him a couple of hours later because he did not come home for lunch. Some terrible things have happened. About six months ago a lady was on a four-wheel motorbike. She had her grandson on the motorbike, something happened and it went backwards under a trailer, I think it was, and killed them both.

When you read these reports it makes you absolutely sick thinking about it, it really does. I really think all the reports have to be put out so that we all know what has happened — all the fatalities and the serious accidents. We have to know about serious accidents because without fixing the contributing factors you are not going to stop a lot of these things happening. They just keep happening and people lose family and friends and that. It is no good.

I have always entered at the Melbourne show. The particular thing I have shown you won at the Melbourne show. I have won at the Melbourne show a number of times with my inventions. A fellow came up to me one day and was talking to me. I was talking about the anti-tip stuff. He had been caught up in one of those round balers. There were women and kids around but he dropped his pants, took off his top and showed me his legs. He has never worked again. You should have seen his legs. If his son had not been there, he would have been dead. Another fellow who came up to us had tipped the tractor over and it rammed his arm right into the ground. He was there for about 8 hours — 8 hours, lying there with a tractor on top of him. As you said, it does not make the machine look any better, but why should we be using dangerous machinery? It has to stop.

Dr NAPTHINE — Have you spoken to the manufacturers?

Mr WINTER — No, I have not spoken to the manufacturers. They are probably not game to talk to me. The wheelbase is too narrow, the centre of gravity is too high, and they just tip them over.
Dr NAPTHINE — What engineering advice do you have with regard to the benefits of this invention of yours?

Mr WINTER — If they want to widen the wheelbase it is up to the manufacturers to put a safe piece of machinery on the market. If they widen the wheelbase, the centre of gravity will probably remain exactly where it is, but the wider it is the less chance you have of tipping the darn thing over. And, of course, people should never be riding those things at 100 kilometres an hour — it is just too dangerous. It is dangerous equipment and it has to be treated as such. All sorts of things happen.

In regard to that auger, I gave this to Ian Trezise. I gave the other platform and handrail thing to Eric Young. I said I was going to give Eric another one. With the augers, you can put a chain or skirt on them so that as the auger goes into the ground, the chain comes up — it is all protected as it comes out of the ground — and keeps that auger protected. There have been two accidents down here with those augers — two people have been tangled up in augers. It is no good being nice about safety. We have to do something about it. We cannot keep killing 14 people a year, because that is exactly what we are doing. It just has to stop and the only way it is going to stop is by getting tough.

I am not working there now, but where I was working we used to have contractors come in and abide by the rules of the company and the union or they did not work there. If people would not wear glasses, face masks, hearing protection or whatever, they were told, ‘You don’t work here. We don’t want you on our list of fatalities or serious accidents or injuries’.

The CHAIR — Thanks very much, Barry.

Mr WINTER — Thanks for the time.

The CHAIR — It is obviously an issue that you are very passionate about and it was good to hear from you.

Witness withdrew.