CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

RURAL AND REGIONAL SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into cause of fatality and injury on Victorian farms

Seymour — 14 April 2004

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Mr D. Findlay, centre manager, primary industries team, Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE (affirmed).
The CHAIR — Could you please give us your full name and address? If you are representing an
organisation, please state its name and the position you hold within it.

Mr FINDLAY — I am David Andrew Findlay. I represent Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE, Fryers
Street, Shepparton. I am the centre manager of the primary industries team in Shepparton.

The CHAIR — Would you like to make some brief comments to your submission, then we will ask you
some questions.

Mr FINDLAY — I have prepared some brief notes, and I will work my way through them. I think you all
have copies. They are relative to the information that I was given.

The main causes of injury that I see relating to farm operations in the rural industry at large relate to: all-terrain
vehicles, or four-wheel-drive bikes as they are known; fatigue; lack of training; tractors; family-operated farms;
general low education on farms; young employees of 15 years or so; lack of responsibility and awareness by
employers; and limited on-site training. I will give brief comments on each one. With ATVs, I think everyone is
fairly much aware that you can go and buy one of those things from anywhere between $1000 and $10 000. You
hop on and away you go. Without a doubt they are a massive risk to everybody.

On fatigue, it is not uncommon for farmers to be doing 20-hour shifts on equipment and machinery. Those in the
rural industry are aware of that, and it is something that should be addressed. Lack of training happens at all levels.
When you buy a new machine a dealer rolls up and gives you the machine and 5 minutes instruction. They then get
you to tick the box to show that you know how to operate it. In our case I refuse to tick the box until a fair and
reasonable time is given to one of my staff members. It also happens when anyone else who buys a machine hops
on and endeavours to teach themselves.

Tractors: some work has been done with the rollover structures. It has been a massive and good campaign,
particularly through the VFF. It is obvious that a lot of work has been done there. Family-operated farms are
traditional in that the kids learn as they go, and that is probably not the only way that things can be done.

As to education, generally we find that people on farms have limited scope of education. In many cases employees
struggle to read and write in very basic terms, and they have no hope of reading a manual of any type. With young
employees, time and again young people at ages 15 and 16 are starting an employment situation and then set off on
their own; they are not supervised, and lack of supervision is one of the things that is of concern. Awareness of
OHS is something that is becoming more understood, but it is still a long way short relating to small employers.
Larger employers seem to be on the ball as to what is happening. I think I have covered the issue of limited on-site
training. I am not in a position to comment on the types of injury seen.

On current programs relating to occupational health and safety: scheduled training, particularly within new
apprenticeships and traineeships, everything that we do in our capacity of any individual units or full course has a
component of occupational health and safety that is done on site with us. If it is an employee situation we visit them
on site and again affirm that we have dealt with them. We do not get into employee-employer situations or
disputes; that is not our role. We give very clear directions to our students as to what are fair and reasonable
requirements relating to employment. The agricultural and horticultural training packages that we deal with are
national, and every unit and module has an OHS component. The managing farm safety program has been out for
probably six or seven years. It initially started as a two-day short course program. In our case I managed to get
Farmbis support for that of about $60. It is not what I would call an expensive course. Getting farmers to come
along has been difficult. They have now moved that into a one-day program. It is highly supported and at no cost.
We ran one of those a couple of weeks ago and it was fairly well attended. A dozen-odd people is pretty good.

Farm chemicals and farm chemical updates again is a national program. We run a lot of those, and it relates also to
obtaining the chemical user permit though DSE. We have run chainsaw awareness programs out of Shepparton,
and we have run the level 1 and level 2 chainsaw courses out of our other campus at Wangaratta. Tractor operation
is a familiar program. We get a number of individuals, but not many, and it is usually run for local groups who are
looking for something. ATV courses are similar. We get a number of individuals, but within our scheduled
programs of full-time courses or part-time courses, they are involved in that.

On schools programs, one of the areas I have really tried to highlight relates to — and I just heard someone talking
about it before — embedding in the younger generation the importance of working with equipment and machinery.
with safety. This includes working with welders, with metal hand tools, woodwork and riding motorcycles, both two-wheelers and four-wheelers. I have tried to put together a course which is entertaining, exciting and fun and, at the end, productive. We feel that that is a good place to start. It has had a lot of success.

Impediments: without a doubt I would put attitude at no. 1. It does not matter what age, what person, what size or where they are, attitude is really the key. The is also awareness of the big issues among employers and managers — that is, that they have a responsibility. Getting them to understand that responsibility is a massive task, and getting past the attitude of, ‘We have always done it this way’. I am not in a position to comment on financial and social costs. We are also doing other things at Goulburn Ovens TAFE. In the past 12 to 18 months a number of large employers have come to us. When I say ‘large’, I am talking of people who employ five or more people. Mostly we deal with employment situations where there are only one or two employees. These people have been coming to us with pretty much specific workplace training requirements in recognition that they have a responsibility. They are after formal recognition of training and/or assessment. They usually come to one or two-day day programs with ATVs, front-end loaders and tractors. They are probably the main ones. We are doing one tomorrow with a chainsaw, for people who already hold qualifications but are required to come in for a refresher-type program. They are pretty much the basics of what we are doing.

Mr INGRAM — In your school programs one of your dot points was about riding motorcycles under controlled conditions. You indicated that it is for both two and four-wheel motorbikes. As part of that do you highlight that most of the common four-wheelers on farms have fairly specific warnings that young people under 16 are not supposed to be on them?

Mr FINDLAY — We do not deal with any students under 16 on those machines, and that is highlighted to them, as is all the other protective safety gear — helmets and so forth. The students we are dealing with are generally from years 10 and 11. Year 9s are not old enough to get on the four-wheelers, and we work them through that. We have a mixed group, and it has been made very clear to them.

Mr INGRAM — If you are doing courses for young ones do you highlight the dangers associated with ATVs?

Mr FINDLAY — Yes. It is our view, and I have certainly been scrutinised by our organisation and other people around us. They have asked, ‘Why are you doing it?’ It is my belief that no other organisation is providing that sort of opportunity where kids are getting on these machines in a controlled environment. If they get on them at all it is at home or elsewhere — for example, at a mate’s place — and it is haywire. We have in the order of 20 motorbikes as a full kit so that you can have lots of people on at one time and get the full gamut of a pretty good range of opportunities on them in what we make a fairly safe environment.

Mr INGRAM — You are saying the take-up in a lot of those courses is a result of recognition of the need for education within particular sections of industry, and you indicated ATVs within the dairy industry as an example. So is it specifically dairy farmers who believe that because of their OHS requirements and the potential risk to their workers, they have to ensure that their employees have the relevant qualifications and training to operate ATVs?

Mr FINDLAY — That is right, and what we are doing is accrediting them against one or two individual units out of a national package and sending on a statement of results, so to speak, that says that this person has been trained and assessed in the operation of the ATV, the front-end loader or the tractor.

Mr INGRAM — Once people have done that course, do you think it is a matter of ticking the box and then going home and forgetting about it, or do you think it sinks in and that those practices become the common practice on the farm?

Mr FINDLAY — In all cases I communicate with employers, the managers or whomever it is and then again with my staff on return, and the feedback is that they all learn something, they all get something out of it and they all very clearly understand what their responsibilities are. Prior to doing the course they more than likely did not. It is reasonably well recognised that we are dealing with adults and that they can operate the machines. The operation is one part of it, but again it is going back to the attitude of how and why, and the level of responsibility. In all cases helmets are implemented; we will not train people if they do not wear helmets. We will not do an
assessment on a tractor if it has a machine without a power take-off cover on it. We are very blunt about things we will and will not do and things we advise people of. It is about a change in attitude, which seems to work.

Dr NAPHTHINE — David, what is the cost of the courses? If I were a new resident in this area and wanted to do a chainsaw awareness course, what would it cost me?

Mr FINDLAY — Current costs for a one-day chainsaw awareness program is $110. That is not government subsidised. You would be aware that being a registered training organisation we have a bucket of government funds and we have a bucket of non-government funds for what we call fee-for-service, and it is at my discretion as to what courses are at what cost. The farm chemicals program is another fee-for-service program, which currently costs $165.

Dr NAPHTHINE — How much for an ATV short course?

Mr FINDLAY — An ATV short course will be anywhere between $60 under a government-funded program and around $100-odd outside that.

Dr NAPHTHINE — One of our charters is to put recommendations to Parliament and government on improving farm safety. Do you think that providing some sort of assistance in terms of subsidising these courses would be a valuable thing to increase take-up and usage?

Mr FINDLAY — I do not think it would make any difference to take-up. I believe the cost of programs is pretty cheap for the outcome that is given, and the managing farm safety program is a good example of that.

Dr NAPHTHINE — Whenever I get a new car through the parliamentary car system, I get a voucher for a defensive driving course, which they see as a reasonable investment to update my driving skills. Do you think it would be appropriate that the sale process for some farm equipment — say, chainsaws, tractors, ATVs and motorbikes — should include a voucher, whether it be subsidised by government or jointly subsidised by the industry, for a training course? So if I bought a chainsaw for $700, I would get a voucher for a one-day training course or a 50 per cent subsidy on a one-day training course.

Mr FINDLAY — I am highly supportive of that concept. I think that would be an excellent idea.

The CHAIR — David, how do you go about promoting the actual courses, which is obviously going to be a bit of an issue, and where do you run them? You have several campuses across the Goulburn–Ovens region; are they run only in Shepparton or are they run in other places? One of the things we are hearing about is accessibility to TAFE courses.

Mr FINDLAY — I will run a program basically anywhere between the outskirts of Melbourne and into New South Wales, into the Riverina, right across to the mountains and nearly to Bendigo. I will go anywhere. There is a cost to that, and in general terms the funding model we are given is 12 students to one trainer. Obviously I have to pro rata that where it is appropriate, and that is part of my role. Going to one farm to deal with one person on one ATV is not economical, as I am sure you will appreciate. So we would generally have minimum numbers or we would collect people together. How do we promote? It is through general paraphernalia related to the Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE, through our associations with bodies that are selling equipment and machinery or through word of mouth. Fundamentally it is through word of mouth. It is very difficult for me to advertise programs in a regional paper or the like. It is expensive, and it comes out of my personal budget from my business end.

The CHAIR — What about the Farmsafe Alliance and the different groups and community services; do they help?

Mr FINDLAY — I am sure you will know that the people who work in regional areas are very good networkers. Without a doubt, all the Farmsafe Alliance areas, the TAFE communities, the schools and the likes work together, and there are no problems at all relating to that. We have no boundaries, so to speak, and we help and assist each other where we can.

The CHAIR — David, thank you very much for your time and your submission. You will get a copy of the transcript, and you can correct any matters of fact or grammar but not matters of substance.
Mr FINDLAY — Thank you.

Witness withdrew.