CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

RURAL AND REGIONAL SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into cause of fatality and injury on Victorian farms

Sea Lake – 24 March 2004

Members

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Cr D. Quayle, Mayor, Swan Hill Rural City Council.
The CHAIR — Would anyone like to comment from the floor. Please tell us your name and address, and if you are representing an organisation please state your position in that organisation.

Cr QUAYLE — I am David Quayle, a councillor with the Swan Hill Rural City Council. I am currently the mayor. I would like to make comments on two areas. Firstly, because of civic responsibility; and secondly, because I have previously been involved in OHS training at a TAFE level. Out of all the disciplines I was involved with, farming was the most frustrating. There is an attitude problem, particularly with young people on farms. Firstly, they ask, ‘Why should we take notice of you? We have been on farms all our lives up to where we are now. What do you know about farm work?’.

If training is to be given to younger people, perhaps on-site training would have more impact than a tertiary education-level, classroom-type thing. People would tend to take a bit more notice of it. I am not advocating licensing young kids to do things on farms — we are overgoverned now — but somewhere along the line somebody has to take responsibility for what happens on farms. Apart from the training aspect of it, there has to be regulation somewhere that says, ‘You cannot operate that machinery until you have received some training somewhere’. How that happens I do not know, but it is too easy for a 12-year-old boy who has ridden around on a tractor with dad for a while to be told, ‘You go and do that today’, and it is accepted that that is all right. I realise that the statistics show that the older age group are the ones with the majority of fatalities, but we also have younger ones, and it is the younger ones who get old and get into the bad habits while they are young. These bad habits can proliferate when they are a bit older.

One of the areas I was involved with was training young people. There were all sorts of levels: safe practices; chemical safety; fire safety; and ergonomics, because they do not want to hurt themselves lifting anything. I felt that planning their time was one of the big aspects of it, because farmers being farmers, they do not plan things very well. If it suits them today to do the job, they will get out and do it. They will work till they drop, then find they are running out of time, so they will take short cuts — and that is one of the big problems, let me tell you. I do not know whether we have currently a code of practice for farm safety, but I suggest that if there is not, it should be developed, and further that on-site education would be more acceptable than education in a classroom situation. The class I had involved about 10 younger people, mainly late teenagers. The only one who took a great deal of interest in it was probably 30 years old, or older. He was an Aboriginal working on a farm, and he was in a training scheme at a TAFE college. He had enough maturity to know that he had to learn something about it, but the others had the attitude, ‘We are here because we have got to be here, but we do not really want to listen to you’. So there is a bridge that has to be crossed, and I do not know how you do it, but this was probably one of the biggest disadvantages.

Mr CRUTCHFIELD — There has been a proposition put to us that shires, in particular, should become more involved in farm safety. We have had a presentation from two shires. One has been involved in audits on farms rather than advocating for WorkSafe, and they are taking some initiatives from the shire. Another shire to the south has put a proposition that you might incorporate farm safety in the municipal health plan. What is your comment in respect of your particular municipality?

Cr QUAYLE — We do not want to get involved in that at this stage, but it is something that we perhaps should look at. The fact that this is an ongoing inquiry into it might develop something along that line. It might even be that we go to the MAV and do it on an overall basis rather than just the odd shire here or there.

Mr CRUTCHFIELD — So you would support that sort of stuff?

Cr QUAYLE — We would support anything that would support farm safety. My background previously was in hospital work, and I know the amount of accidents that come in involving farm safety.

Mr WALSH — Would you be happy for that to come out of your budget, or would you expect — —

Cr QUAYLE — No, I would not be happy for it come out of my budget. There is enough of that cost shifting going on! No, it is a responsibility of all councils to do something about it, but funding is one of the problems which hopefully you will address.

The CHAIR — Thanks very much for that. Thank you very much for your attendance today.

Committee adjourned.