

Fact Sheet: Farm Injuries

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Introduction

Even though Australian farming makes up approximately four percent of the work force, it accounts for around 20 percent of all work-related injury (FarmSafe WA). Every three days, a person is fatally injured on an Australian farm (FarmSafe WA). However, this is a major concern not only for the individual's pain and suffering, but also because farmers would miss out on the hours and work. The annual cost of injury to the agricultural sector is estimated to be between \$0.5 and \$1.29 billion (FarmSafe WA).

Who is at risk?

The injury rates on Australian farms increases with age with male rates being higher than female rates in all age groups (NCCH 2004). Injury rates increased according to the remoteness of the person's residence. Across all ages, the injury severity score assigned to 13.6% of cases suggested that the injuries sustained posed a significant threat to life (NCCH 2004). It is not only the farmers themselves that are affected by farm related injuries. Also, visitors to the farms are at greater risk of injury than people who work there.

Examples of Farm Injuries

Falls Injury

The risk of falling and being injured from a fall increases as people age. Preventing falls in older people is important because they often result in serious injury, including admission to hospital. A fall is also the most common reason for admission to residential aged care so avoiding falls can help people victims to remain active and independent on the farm. In NSW alone, over a 5 year period, 6,768 people had to be admitted to hospital as a result of an injury on a farm. People aged over 55 made up over a third of these injuries (FarmSafe WA).

Risks can be classed into two categories: individual risks and as well as risks in the farm workplace. Individual risks are specific to the person and may be increased by health problems, medications, poor balance, limited flexibility and reduced muscle strength. Risks in the farm workplace vary according to the type of farm and type of work being undertaken (FarmSafe WA).

Noise injury

Farming is a noisy industry. With a large number of activities undertaken involving exposures to noise levels, it can cause permanent hearing loss and/or impairment. The degree of hearing loss depends on the length of time exposed to the noise and the intensity (loudness) of the noise. The damage is painless and often not noticed until a significant number of cells are destroyed (FarmSafe WA).

All machinery or activities where a person needs to raise their voice to communicate 1 metre away, is considered a noise hazard. Common farm noise hazards include tractors, chainsaws & firearms. Put simply, the louder the noise, the less time can be spent exposed to it before damage starts to occur. Exposure to several noisy activities in the day is also cumulative toward the recommended daily noise limit (FarmSafe WA).

Vehicles and Machinery (FarmSafe WA)

The two most common mechanisms of injury in Australia: motorcycles and animal riding show distinct patterns of injury. The principal body regions injured in incidents involving a motorcycle were the hip and lower limb (30.8%); the shoulder and upper limb (29.2%) and the head (26.5%). The most common type of injury was a fracture (46.4%). For cases where the mechanism of injury was the riding of an animal, the head (38.5%) and the shoulder and upper limb (33.8%) were the most commonly injured body parts. This was similar in motorcycles cases, with fractures being the most numerous type of injury (43.6%), followed by intracranial injury (21.4%).

Child Safety

Farms are great places for kids when we create the right environment, but safety for children on farms is a major concern in Australia. On average, 30 children die on Australian farms each year with 575 hospital admissions in 2004 (FarmSafe WA). Children (0-14yrs) make up 15-20% of farm injury deaths, with around 66% being male. In addition, one child under 16 years is fatally injured on an Australian farm every fortnight with around 25% of all child deaths being visitors to the farm.

The age and development characteristics place children at a much greater risk compared to adults. The major causes of child deaths and injuries on farms are dams, farm vehicles, machinery, motorcycles and horses. However, drowning is still the number one cause of child farm fatality in Australia accounting for around 35-40% on child farm deaths, with farm dams being by far the most common site.

For non-fatal injury of children on farms, older children (5 - 14 yrs) figure more prominently particularly in relation to injury from 2 and 4 wheeled motorbikes and horses. Whilst there tends to be more hospital emergency department presentations for 2-wheeled motorbikes, injuries from ATVs are likely to be more severe or fatal. There are four times as many children being killed riding ATVs than 2 wheel motorbikes on farms (NFIDC, 2007).

Preventing farm injury

- Education often combined with incentives to promote behaviour change
- Engineering/technology solutions in the form of improvements to safety systems
- Safer machinery and maintenance of equipment and the use of protective devices
- Safety legislation/regulation and enforcement
- Multifaceted inventions that combine two or more of these approaches
- Providing safer environments for young children close to the house
- First Aid Training and Awareness

FURTHER INFORMATION:

AgHealth Australia

<http://www.aghealth.org.au/>

FarmSafe WA

<http://www.farmsafewa.org/>

Injury Control Resource Information Network (USA)

<http://www.injurycontrol.com/icrin/>

Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety

<http://www.medfac.usyd.edu.au/research/units/agric.php>

Hazard Victorian Injury Surveillance Unit VISU

<http://www.monash.edu.au/muarc/VISU/hazard/haz68.pdf>