

INTRODUCTION

Managing Sugarcane Farm Safety



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MANAGING FARM HEALTH AND SAFETY

Sugarcane Farm Safety Checklists Identifying Hazards to Health and Safety

Foreword

Australian agriculture has one of the highest rates of workplace injuries. It is one aim of the Joint Research Venture for Farm Health & Safety to develop practical information and management tools designed to assist producers in agricultural industries to reduce the risk of injury and illness associated with work in a practical and efficient way. In the long term, this will work towards enhancing productivity and health and safety for individual farm enterprises, and the sugarcane industry, by reducing fatality and injury rate on Australian farms.

The Joint Research Venture for Farm Health & Safety program has been developed with industry and for industry. It represents current best practice for occupational health and safety on farms.

This project was funded by partners in the RIRDC-managed Joint Research Venture for Farm Health & Safety R&D program, whose membership includes the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation, Grains Research and Development

Corporation, Cotton Research and Development Corporation, Sugar Research and Development Corporation, Meat and Livestock Australia, Australian Wool Innovation and Dairy Australia.

This report, an addition to RIRDC's diverse range of over 1700 research publications, forms part of our Joint Research Venture for Farm Health and Safety R&D program, which focuses on the adoption of improved systems for primary industries health and safety.

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Peter O'Brien
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Introduction

State Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Acts and Regulations are similar in all states in that they lay down the responsibilities of key parties involved in reducing risk of injury and illness associated with work. Responsibilities of *employers* include:

- Consultation with workers to implement OHS program
- Provision of a safe working environment
- Organisation of safe systems of work
- Maintenance of work areas, machinery and equipment in a safe condition
- Ensuring safe use, handling, storage and transport of plant and hazardous substances
- Assessment of health and safety risks to employees and others in the workplace, and institution of effective risk control measures
- Provision of adequate information, induction, instruction, training and supervision to employees
- Provision of adequate facilities for the welfare of workers

Employees also have responsibilities. Workers must take reasonable care of the health and safety of themselves and others, and cooperate with management in (its) efforts to comply with occupational health and safety requirements.

Employers and self-employed persons must ensure the health and safety of people visiting or working at their places of work, who are not their employees, by not exposing them to risk. This responsibility includes contractors.

Manufacturers, designers and suppliers of plant and substances for use by people at work must make sure that they are safe and without risks to health when properly used. They must also supply adequate information to ensure safe use.

The hazard checklists following provide a working document for growers to identify *common* hazards on the farm that need attention. The checklists are not complete, as hazards will vary from farm to

farm. Space has been provided for farmers to add additional hazards that are identified. The checklist and templates are farmers' records to show that management of hazards on the farm has been planned.

Hazard identification represents only one of the key steps in implementing the health and safety risk management process.

The key processes (or steps) that must be set in place to manage OHS risk are:

1. **Consult with workers** - There must be systems for workers to participate in the OHS program of your enterprise
2. **Identify hazards** - Safety hazards must be identified in a systematic way
3. **Assess risk** - Risks associated with safety hazards must be assessed
4. **Control risk** - Risks must be controlled to prevent injury
5. **Keep records** - Records of the above processes must be kept



These are not steps to be taken on a once-off basis. The process would be better described in this way:

The farm health and safety checklists are based on real injury and illness data associated with farming enterprises. However, it should not be regarded as an exhaustive list of existing or potential hazards, and cannot possibly cover every potential event. Notwithstanding this, however, it is a solid starting point from which you can develop an effective and efficient safety management program.

Health and Safety Risk Management

Consultation with workers

Farmers should involve with their workers (including family members who work on the farm) in setting up a system for ongoing active participation in the farm's OHS program. Workers should be encouraged to report any unsafe working condition, and to advise when attention is needed (for example, to replace guards and personal protective equipment and where systems could be made safer).

Regular times should be made to discuss OHS with workers, for example at weekly job planning meetings.

The process of undertaking the regular hazard identification check and risk assessment will be enhanced by involving workers who undertake the jobs in that part of the farm workplace.

Hazard Identification

The most important first step to improving safety on farms is to identify all the hazards to health and safety on the property. The following checklists are designed to assist in identifying hazards in different Australian farming enterprises.

At the beginning of each section there is provision for the owner/manager, or another responsible person, to sign off and date the day the hazard inspection was undertaken.

Remember, this document is a record (and therefore defence) that a hazard inspection has been conducted, and the results recorded as part of a commitment to managing health and safety on the farm.

It may be necessary to undertake hazard inspection on the farm over several days, focusing on specific work areas at a time. However, it is important that the checklist/s are signed and dated, providing documentary evidence of this important step in the OHS risk management process.

Risk Assessment

Where a hazard has been identified, then an assessment of the risk associated with the hazard must be made. The degree of risk is a combination of the potential severity of injury and the frequency of exposure to the hazard. In all instances where risk is considered HIGH, urgent action to fix the problem should be planned. The following table is useful in determining the relative significance of risks.

Consequence of injury	Frequency of exposure to hazard			
	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Rarely
Kill or disable	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH
Several days off work	HIGH	HIGH	MEDIUM	MEDIUM
First aid	HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW	LOW

Source: Adapted from Worksafe Australia. *Plant in the Workforce: Making it Safe*. Commonwealth of Australia, August 1995

There has been a column called "Level of Risk" included in the checklist for recording the result of risk assessment activities for identified hazards.

Risk Control

Once hazards of significant risk have been identified, then action should be planned and implemented to control that risk. To assist with this process, a health and safety action plan has been incorporated into the checklist, to assist in assessing and recording options. Generally, eliminating the hazard is the most effective solution, and every effort should be made to eliminate hazards of high risk. However, practicalities and cost often limit this option. From least to most effective, control measures include:

1. Eliminate the risk
2. Substitute the risk for a lesser risk
3. Engineering controls, including design for safety, guarding and other isolation solutions.
4. Design safer work procedures, practices and training
5. Use of personal protective equipment.

The guidance notes included in these resources give more detail about risk control measures for specific hazards and work processes.

Monitoring and review of OHS control

Following the implementation of the safety management approach as outlined in this package, it is vital that continued monitoring of the health and safety risks on the farm occurs. This can be achieved by:

- Going through the checklist regularly (at least annually)
- Continuing to be on the lookout for new hazards
- Anticipating hazards which result from changes in your system of work or when new equipment is purchased
- Assessing new hazards as soon as they are noticed, adding them to the checklist and taking control measures

- Checking that control measures are working
- Developing an understanding of safety in all workers and family members which encourages them to adopt the OHS best practice principles.

Records

Keeping records of risk management activities will provide evidence of a grower fulfilling obligations to identify any foreseeable hazard, assessing the risk, and eliminating or controlling the risk. The checklist and accompanying action plan will become a record of these activities. In addition, templates have been included in this resource package for the following registers.

These records will assist growers to in fulfill legislative requirement to keep records.

- **Register of Farm Chemicals**

In most states Occupational Health and Safety legislation requires that a register be kept of all hazardous substances on the farm. Section 3 of the 'Managing Farm Safety' resource package provides a template that will assist in maintaining these records.

- **Register of Training of Farm Workers**

Occupational Health and Safety legislation places a responsibility on employers to provide induction and training where employees are required to undertake hazardous tasks, and quite specifically where employees handle hazardous substances, including pesticides. The Register of Training (Section 4) provides evidence that the grower has fulfilled training and induction obligations.

- **Farm Injury Register**

Another process which may help to pinpoint high risk activities on-farm is the use of an injury register to record exactly what injuries occur and how they happen. This information can also be used for recording 'critical incidents' and provides a valuable management tool for identifying other hazards which may exist on the farm. Section 5 of the resource package includes a copy of a farm injury register. This form may be photocopied to provide on-going record of injuries on the farm.

It should be noted that in most states and territories, Occupational Health and Safety legislation requires employers to notify the appropriate WorkCover Authority of any injury or illness on the farm to an employee, sub-contractor or visitor that results in 'significant injury or illness' (refer to specific State or Territory legislation for requirements and notification forms).

Farm Enterprise Occupational Health and Safety Policy

This Farm Enterprise Occupational Health and Safety Policy template will form the basis for the overall farm OHS management system. It is a statement of intent and outlines the owner's/manager's

commitment to occupational health and safety. The health and safety policy should be reviewed annually to ensure that it remains current and incorporates changes.

In summary the key risks posed by safety hazards on farm enterprises relate to:

1. Harm to health and well-being of farmers, workers and family members
2. Costs associated with injury/illness
3. Prosecution for breaches of OHS legislation

This package will assist in managing health and safety for the most important agricultural resource, those people who work and live on Australian farms.

