Info Sheet

Rural Workers

When vehicles are used for work purposes (either onsite or in road traffic), they become a workplace under work health and safety (WHS) legislation, requiring the risks associated with these vehicles to be managed.

Around 20% of all kilometres travelled by passenger vehicles is for business purposes, excluding travel to and from work.\(^1\) Vehicle use in road traffic is the most significant contributor to work-related traumatic injury in Australia, particularly fatalities.

- Vehicle collisions were the cause of 32% of Australian worker fatalities and 61% of Australian bystander fatalities in 2016-17\(^2\)
- Vehicle incidents were 2.5% of all serious injury claims in Australia in 2016-17\(^3\)
- Around one quarter of all fatal road crashes involve a vehicle being used for business, the majority of these involving a car or light truck.\(^4\)

Over the five years to 2017, vehicle incidents accounted for 25% of fatalities in the agriculture industry.\(^5\) Aside from roll-overs of non-road vehicles, being trapped by moving machinery and being hit by moving objects, "vehicle incidents" in the agriculture industry are the main cause of fatality for:

- Sheep, beef cattle and grain farming (27% of all fatalities)
- Dairy cattle farming (42%)
- Fruit and tree nut growing (18%)
- Other livestock farming (29%).

Issues

In rural environments, vehicles are commonly used for work purposes in the following industries: mining, agriculture, forestry, and fishing, public administration and safety, and road transport. There is a wide variety of vehicles used on rural roads, such as: passenger cars, utes, pick-up trucks and other four-wheel drive vehicles, light trucks carting livestock, goods and equipment, motorcycles, quad bikes and special work vehicles, and farming plant.

These vehicles may be the workplace for: farm workers, truck drivers, trades people, managers and supervisors. The workers may:

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1. Australian Bureau of Statistics: 9208.0 - Survey of Motor Vehicle Use, Australia 12 months to 30 June 2018
2. Safe Work Australia Work-related Traumatic Injury Fatalities, Australia 2017
5. Safe Work Australia (2018), Priority Industry Snapshot: Agriculture
• Be young, with little driving experience
• Be recent migrants with language barriers and little familiarity with local conditions
• Be transporting family or other visitors for long distances, and
• Have physical or mental health limitations that can impact on driving.

Hazards, Risks and Management

Refer to the separate infosheet relating to addressing WHS hazards, risks and management associated with use of vehicles in road traffic.

Additional hazards specific for rural workers may be:

• Particularly long distances, sometimes at unexpected times of the day or night, in many different environments and conditions
• Exposure on high speed roads where mistakes are more likely to result in fatal or serious injury, and irregular hazards are more likely to appear such as:
  o slow moving vehicles where overtaking is dangerous
  o unsealed or less well maintained roads
  o wild animals and livestock
  o flooding and bushfires
  o Vehicles carrying or towing large loads, or loads which may not be well secured
  o Distraction from livestock being carried
• Possible carry over of poor off-road practices (in seat belts or helmet use for example) onto use of public roads.

Make sure for rural workers that:

• All equipment is secured so that it isn’t a hazard in a crash for either the occupants or bystanders
• Staff transporting dangerous or heavy equipment are appropriately trained for the task and have access to appropriate assistance
• There is a reliable means of communication and a process for workers to advise the safe completion of a remote/isolated work journey. This info sheet may be useful for small and medium enterprises.