Identifying and prioritising work health & safety overlaps across the agriculture and fisheries sectors

Rural Safety & Health Alliance Report Summary - October 2020

Aim

To provide a comprehensive overview of the commonalities of injury, illness and deaths, plus health and safety risks associated with the agricultural and fisheries sectors. This contributes to the evidence base used by the RSHA to invest in priority projects to reduce the burden of death and serious injury.

Method

Data from four sources, informed the development of the individual sector profiles and detailed matrix assessing the commonalities of risks across sectors. This included:

- fatality data - from the National Coroners Information System (NCIS) for the period (2014-15 to 2018-19);
- workers compensation data - from the National Data Set for Compensation-Based Statistics (NDS) managed by Safe Work Australia (2013-14 to 2017-18p);
- zoonotic illness information from the Australian National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System (2016-2020 YTD); and
- qualitative feedback from a range of stakeholders within each of the participating industries RDC's and external providers, inclusive of issues addressing mental health and wellbeing.

Information within the sectoral profiles, included the identification of specific hazards based on the data. These were then risk-rated based on the hazard severity and frequency of exposure.

Results/Discussion

Overall, there were 16 of 34 hazards identified as common to all 12 sectors. Those more likely to result in a fatal outcome, involved tractors, other vehicles (ute-car-truck-SSV, water, mobile plant, fixed plant, fuels/fertiliser, electrical powerlines/ systems, falls from structures, confined spaces). Of the data for the most recent five-year recording period (2014-15 to 2018-19), there were:

- Nine sectors in which 26 tractor fatalities occurred, (runovers 14, rollovers 7, maintenance 5)
- Nine sectors in which 34 quad bike fatalities occurred,
- Eight sectors in which 19 mobile plant (excluding tractors/quads) fatalities occurred, (feed/water livestock 5, harvesting, sowing, maintenance, loading/unloading, fencing),
- Eight sectors in which 26 ute-car-truck-SSV fatalities occurred, (utes 13, car / truck 7, SSV 6),
- Nine sectors in which 24 livestock/fish fatalities occurred (24 deaths: horse 10, cattle 9, fish, sheep, deer),
- Three sectors in which 18 water-related fatalities occurred (14 at sea),
- Four sectors in which 6 electrical related fatalities occurred.

RURAL SAFETY & HEALTH ALLIANCE

AUTHORS Tony Lower | Kerri-Lynn Peachey
ORGANISATION AgHealth Australia
PROJECT RSHA03

RURAL SAFETY & HEALTH ALLIANCE

Identifying and prioritising work health & safety overlaps across the agriculture and fisheries sectors

The seven non-fatal hazards common to all sectors were: hand tools, zoonoses, noise, bending/ twisting/lifting, insect/particles, machinery fires and heat. In assessing the workers compensation data, there is a relatively consistent pattern of mechanisms involving either being hit by moving objects, body stressing (manual handling etc.), vehicles, plus falls, trips and slips across sectors.

When matched alongside the agency of injury, there is some evidence of variation with cropping sectors (grain, cotton, fodder), more likely to have mobile plant as the leading agency, while the large animal sectors (beef, dairy, horses, pork, sheep), were more likely to involve animal, human or biological agencies.

Meanwhile the fishery and poultry (eggs & meat) sectors, clearly had non-powered hand tools as an elevated risk. The shearing sector was the only one with an enhanced risk for fixed plant (noting that fixed plant was also one of the nine common fatal hazards across all sectors).

Further, there were additional hazards that were identified as being present in at least 75% (n=9-11) of the sectors involved in the project, including. trees (nine sectors - 6 deaths); and, silos (ten sectors - 3 deaths).

Summary

This report clearly identifies the hazards and risks with potentially fatal outcomes and/or serious injury consequences that are common in the participating sectors. Of the 34 hazards identified, 24 of these were present across at least 75% (nine) sectors.

This provides an opportunity for co-investment to address relevant identified risks. The report also informs RSHA Partners of the sector-specific priorities for their respective WHS impact and can guide individual producers to focus on priority hazards and risks.

The persistent human cost of death, injury and ill health in agriculture and fishing is significant. The economic burden of this is conservatively estimated at $840 million (2014-2019).

Stay up to date at www.rsha.com.au

Recommendations

The following recommendations are in accordance with the RSHA objective of using evidence-based information to make targeted collaborative RD&E investment decisions, where investment can have both human and economic impact.

Recommendation 1: Initiate a cross-sectoral implementation program addressing five key risks. Fatalities - from mobile plant, vehicles and electrical hazards: Serious Injury - from manual handling, along with slips, trips and falls.

Recommendation 2: Maintain a watching brief on Mental Health and Wellbeing initiatives and seek suitable partnership arrangements where feasible

Recommendation 3: Establish an expert panel to assist with the provision of advice on future Work Health & Safety technology developments.

Recommendation 4: Initiate a program of work to assess and reduce the negative impacts of fatigue on WHS in the agriculture and fisheries sectors

The Rural Safety and Health Alliance is a cross-sectoral collaboration comprising nine Rural Research and Development Corporations: AgriFutures Australia, Australian Eggs, Australian Pork Limited, Australian Wool Innovation, Cotton Research and Development Corporation, Dairy Australia, Fisheries Research and Development Corporation, Grains Research and Development Corporation, and Meat and Livestock Australia.