

Workplace health and safety starter



In South Australia 4.5% of the total workforce works in agriculture; however, almost 19% of workplace deaths occur on farms.

This means South Australian farmers are being fatally injured at a rate of almost five times their share of the workforce. On top of the high fatality rate, every week nine South Australian primary producers are injured seriously enough to access work injury insurance. The majority of fatalities and serious injuries are preventable.

Commodity groups most at risk of serious injury are sheep, beef cattle and grain production, followed by grape growing and fruit and tree nut growing. For the period 2012-2016, the most common farm injuries across the agriculture sector were caused by:

- Muscular stress while manual handling or lifting
- Falls on the same level
- Vehicle accidents
- Being hit by animals.

Source: SafeWork SA <https://www.safework.sa.gov.au/business-industry/agriculture-horticulture/health-safety-guide>

SafeWork SA simple safety steps

1. Commitment to WHS
2. Consultation
3. Managing hazards
4. Informing, training and supervising
5. Maintaining a safe workplace
6. Keeping records

Having the right safety culture

Having a safe business starts and ends with having the right culture. In practical terms this means:

- Working in a safe manner at all times
- Being positive in your attitude regarding safety
- Leading by example
- Being open to suggestions and feedback
- Changing practices to focus on safety. This may mean sacrificing some efficiency and/or adding a cost
- Constantly reviewing practices to see if alternative methods can be found
- Making a plan for operations that has built-in flexibility and quieter periods to ensure there is manageable pressure
- Having an over-arching workplace safety policy that communicates your commitment to safety and acknowledges that it is a shared responsibility for all in the workplace
- Continuous consultation and discussions with employers and stakeholders.

Manage hazards

You should conduct a risk assessment to determine any hazards in your workplace and introduce measures to eliminate or minimise the risks.

The risk management process involves four steps:

- Identification – what is the problem?
- Assessment – how bad is it?
- Control – what will we do to fix it? Consider reasonably practicable
- Review – how did it go?

Source: SafeWork SA <https://www.safework.sa.gov.au/resources/how-manage-work-health-and-safety-risks>

This risk assessment should be reviewed every 6–12 months, or when things change such as new equipment or prior to peak periods.

Why not get an aerial **photo of your worksite** and use this to map the risks. Given the increase in affordability of drones, this is now a straightforward task. Identify where the traffic flows, where chemicals are stored and loaded, where visitors, contractors or children come to, machinery movement, etc. Develop an action plan based on your aerial view.

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Controlling risks

When you identify a risk in your business, you need to manage it. The extent of this action is guided by the hierarchy of risk control.

Hierarchy of risk control is outlined in the table below. The aim is to start with level 1 control, if that cannot be achieved then move down.

Level 1	Eliminate	Remove the hazard completely from the workplace (eg remove trip hazards on the floor or dispose of unwanted chemicals). This is the most effective control measure and must always be considered first.
	Substitute	Substitute or replace the hazard with a less hazardous work practice (eg replace solvent-based paints with water-based paints).
Level 2	Isolate	As much as possible, separate the hazard or hazardous work practice from people by distance or using barriers (eg place guards around moving parts of machinery).
	Engineering controls	These are physical control measures (eg use a trolley to lift heavy loads).
Level 3	Administrative controls	These should only be considered when other higher order control measures are not practicable. These are work methods or procedures that are designed to minimise the exposure to a hazard (eg develop a procedure on how to operate machinery safely or use signs to warn people of a hazard).
	Personal protective equipment (PPE)	Ear muffs, hard hats, masks, gloves, protective eyewear and other forms of PPE should be a last option as they do nothing to change the hazard itself. Effectiveness also relies on the proper fit, use and maintenance.

Sometimes a combination of control levels will be used.

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Keeping records

Having the right safety culture and taking action to manage risks should be the core focus. Documentation and records are a secondary focus. Don't create a safety system to just 'tick a box', it needs to be a practical reflection of your workplace practices.

The detail and extent of required records will depend on the size of your workplace and the potential for major work health and safety issues.

Keeping records is essential for high risk areas, such as asbestos and chemicals. Please refer to the individual codes of practices.

Important documents to understand as business owners and managers

WHS Act and WHS Regulations
<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/law-and-regulation/model-whs-laws>

WHS Code of Practice
<https://www.safework.sa.gov.au/law-compliance/laws-regulations/codes-practice>

Handy resources

SafeWork SA
<https://www.safework.sa.gov.au/>

Farmsafe
<https://www.farmsafe.org.au/>

Safe Work Australia
<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/agriculture>

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