

Be alive and healthy after harvest

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You are a long time dead or, if severely injured, you will regret not taking the extra time or precautions to avoid accidents or near misses where too many farmers, contractors and their workers sometimes find themselves! Make no mistake, I have seen and heard of too many deaths or near deaths and too many disfiguring/disabling injuries to be nice and politically correct about this subject. I and no doubt most readers, will have heard about, seen or worse still, experienced first hand near misses of serious injury or possible death. These are wake up calls!

There is legislation, laws, guidelines, warnings in equipment manual, signs denoting danger areas of machines and best of intentions but deaths, serious injuries or what could have been serious injuries, still occur every season. Why? Is it because we too easily become complacent when no accidents have occurred over a long period, and near misses are soon forgotten despite defaecating in your britches?

At the end of the day you, the individual owner operating the equipment, is responsible for your own safety. However, a farmer or contractor who have employees working with their equipment are also ultimately responsible for their safety. Unfortunately some farm owners and contractors, despite the high penalty rates for not providing a safe workplace and looking after their wellbeing, ignore, pay lip service or play ignorant to their legal requirements. They still sometimes coerce/cajole their workers to operate with poorly maintained or unsafe machinery, in unsafe working conditions and allow fatigue to occur due to inadequate breaks or lack of sleep time.

Often these days, equipment operators are allowed to have ipod leads stuck in their ears so they cannot hear machinery malfunctions, warning beeps or calls from others, vehicle horns, etc. Worse still, many now have iphones where they can listen to music and bugger me dead, actually send SMS messages or talk to mates while operating very expensive equipment in very dangerous conditions.

Inexperience and lack of or poor on job training has also led to many accidents and these can be “business breaking” experiences for the owner (farmer or contractor) if they cannot show credible evidence that they have trained their staff sufficiently to be able to properly and safely operate their equipment. High wages, pressure from farmers and weather conditions to get the job done yesterday, high cost of machinery, high maintenance and repair costs leading to high and fast throughput often results in many corners being cut and safety concerns neglected, reduced or overlooked.

A major issue for safety is when everything becomes routine, nothing or very little ever goes wrong, or having gotten away with dubious actions or removing annoying safety shields allows complacency to creep in.

That’s the nice part of this discussion, now for the unfortunate and ugly reality that can so often happen or the many occasions where it could have happened but soon forgotten. When something horrible does happen, as some of you will have

experienced personally or know someone in this boat, how have you felt if it was yourself or if it was one of your own workers, often friends? How has the incident affected your work load? How has it affected their wife and children? How has it impacted on your business or future business? If a serious incident results in a hospital visit, you are highly likely to get a knock on the door from WorkSafe personnel and the hurt will start, especially if you are non-compliant.

Some incidents that I have heard about and cringe every time I think about them. I have heard of guys trying to unblock baler pick-ups while it is still turning and the tines grab a sleeve or arm. Even at idle, the pick up is quick and strong and a baler trying to feed a body through the forage harvester rollers or baler throat may stall the tractor but the picture is ugly. Don't even want to think about a baler with a chopper mechanism.

Then there is a guy, well trained by the contractor in all aspects of machine operation and maintenance and the worker himself was very conscious of how dangerous forage harvesters can be. The knife drum had become clogged with grass and mud and needed to be cleaned out. The machine was shut down and the majority of the blockage was cleared from the knife drum. However, this usually takes a couple of attempts so the harvester was restarted to crank up the cutting drum and move the remaining material to where it could be removed and the machine was again shut down. Unfortunately, the worker was cleaning the mud and grass out while the knife drum still slowing down. On the fourth dive in, he lost a finger!

How often have we heard of bales of silage or hay starting to slowly roll down a hill and people have jumped off a tractor to try to stop it. I won't even mention how well the handbrake has been applied and whether it can hold the tractor + baler rocking back and forth if still in baling action, on a slope. Sorry, couldn't help myself. Now gotta get in front of, or to the leading edge of the frigging rolling bale to stop it or at least turn it across the slope! Can you lift 400 to 600 kilogram? Then how the hell are you going to stop this weight when it's moving downhill? Sometimes, yes, most times, probably not!

Now think of these weights in the shape of round or square bales on front forks when stacking or unloading from several bales height and they drop unexpectedly, for a range of reasons, onto a flimsy tractor cabin or set of ROPS.

What about disasters waiting to happen when rolling stacks with more than one compacting tractor where a proper safe method of working has not been established? What about any equipment operation at night where blinding lights can momentarily blind someone at a critical moment? Better than dim or no lights, admittedly. What about a rear wheel dropping off the side of a stack or over a concrete bunker wall at night due to darkness or fatigue? A solid rail on the wall will avoid this (Figure 1). What about the chaser cart running into the side of the forager or up the rear of the cart and tractor in front because the driver was texting or in La La land because their favourite head bashing music was playing on the ipod or iphone?

The list is endless and frightening. What about all of your own experiences and stories you have heard about that expand the above list very widely? If I have got the attention and action to prevent only one serious injury this season, this article was

well worth writing. When you think everything is going well and hunky dory, you've taken your eye off safety! Safe harvest, guys.



Figure 1. Pipe railing can avoid wheels dropping over wall tops