

Farm workplace deaths down but challenges lie ahead



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There were two farm workplace deaths recorded during the first five months of 2021. With an average of 21 farm deaths per annum over the last decade, the 2021 level is, so far, well below average. While any avoidable death is a tragedy for the family involved, this is welcome news. It means we are (possibly) making progress towards the only acceptable goal: zero fatalities in the farm workplace.

The reason for the decline in fatal injuries may be that there are more people on farms due to the COVID-19 lockdown. Many family members who are students or off-farm workers are living and working from home on farms and available to “lend a hand” with farm work.

In addition, there have been virtually no off-farm events or activities for farmers to attend during the lockdown, so work can be done at a steadier pace.

Injury causation

The current trend tallies with research conducted by Teagasc health

and safety specialists among 1,151 farmers. These farmers gave their rankings on the causes of farm accidents and the results have been published in the scientific journal, *Agronomy Research*.

Highest ranked as the most frequent cause of injury (31.6%) was farm vehicle and machinery impact including knockdowns and crushes. The second highest ranked was “organisational” causes (21.3%) with “not taking care” and “rushing” accounting for 65.5% of causes within this category.

Further causes of injury ranked in order were livestock (18.4%); slurry (13%), trips and falls or buildings-related (7.2%); electrical (4.8%) and other (2.2%).

Overall, this study indicates that farmers rank both physical causes and work organisation issues as major causes of injury. The data tallies with injury prevention models which indicate that a combination of safety behaviours and a safe physical workplace are required to achieve injury prevention.

Children and older farmers

A concerning finding of the study was the very low rankings give to childhood injuries (1.3%) while “older farmer age” received no ranking.

On average, one in 10 accidental farm deaths is that of a child, each is a tragedy. Farmers aged 65 and older are the victims of 45% of farm deaths. Much greater attention needs to be given to both the young and old on farms, especially over the summer months.

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Safety in summer

The high-risk period for farm safety is from now into July and August when there is high risk of farm injuries. In addition, as COVID-19 restrictions lift, it means that the additional help on farms is likely to return to working away from the farm.

However, farm injuries can be cut substantially if farmers adopt injury prevention measures and focus work organisation to prevent doing work when rushed.

Key controls and behaviours to prevent farm injuries are described in the HSA Risk Assessment Document available to all farmers.

Work organisation essential for safety

A major Teagasc study indicates that a higher level of farm workplace injuries occur on farms which are poorly capitalised. Poorly capitalised farms require longer working hours often involving older farmers.

Long hours lead to tiredness and little time for family or friends. Inadequate machinery capacity and poor maintenance also lead to “rushing” which is a major contributor to farm injuries.

Long hours also eat into time for

Farm safety code of practice training

Trained staff in both Teagasc and agricultural consultancies provide a half-day training on completion of the RAD.

The requirement to submit a farm safety COP training attendance letter as part of the TAMS II payment claim process has been reinstated by the DAFM.

It was temporarily suspended in 2020 as it was not possible to safely hold in-person training courses due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Course

The DAFM recently announced that all farm safety training courses completed after 28 February 2021 must be completed online to be acceptable for TAMS II payment claims.

This will be reviewed over the coming weeks in light of reduced COVID-19 restrictions.

Contact your local Teagasc office if you would like to attend a farm safety course.



leisure and exercise off the farm, which in turn affects quality of life and health in the long term.

Labour declining

The labour resources available to farming are gradually declining and becoming more expensive. The way to identify if you are labour-efficient is to figure out the work hours used by each person on the farm.

Ways of solving a work organisation problem are to: examine your enterprise mix; examine your buildings and farm layout, look at the machinery systems in place and the extent to which you use contractors. Farm profitability should be examined in association with work organisation to ensure that your time is well spent.

TAMS deadline

The DAFM, TAMS II scheme provides grant aid for a wide range of farm developments, which aid farm health and safety. In addition, there is a list of specific health and safety items, which are grant-aided under this scheme.

This scheme closes for applications

in November 2021. Due to the prolonged CAP negotiations, there may not be another scheme for some time.

The best advice is to consider what farm developments you currently require and consult with your advisor about making an application.

Farm Safety Week

This year's Farm Safety Week (19 to 23 July). One of the objectives of the week is to dispel the myths surround risk assessment and encourage farmers to take measures to ensure safety of all on the farm.

The week will offer five days of themed practical advice and guidance. This will be the ninth year of the initiative.

It takes place in the UK and Ireland and is led in Ireland by the IFA. Teagasc will be supporting this initiative again this year.

The week will bring attention to the importance of working safely in farming and it will promote good safety practices and share positive stories to help improve safety on farms.

To find out more, visit the Teagasc website.

Risk assessment document

It is a legal requirement to have an up-to-date farm safety code of practice risk assessment document for your farm.

The original code was produced by the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) in 2006 following the passing into law of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act (SHWW), 2005.

The current version has a green cover to distinguish it from the previous version and is available from the HSA and Teagasc.

Practical

The farm safety code of practice risk assessment document is designed to help farmers meet their duties under the SHWW Act 2005 in a straightforward and practical way.

It focuses in on the most common hazards and provides workable solutions that can be put in place with minimal to zero cost.