

Why July is the most dangerous month

Grim figures suggest greater caution than ever is needed on farms in summer.

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Teagasc Health and Safety officer.



July is 'danger month' on farms. During the 10-year period described in Figure 1, July averaged 20 on-farm deaths.

This is 66% or more than two-thirds higher than the next highest month, May, which accounted for an average of 12 deaths.

Any farm death is a tragedy and our aim here is to try to prevent not only the loss of life, but also the sadness and hardship for families which ensues from farm fatalities.

August and September, along with May and July, make up the four highest months for farm deaths.

These stark figures should motivate everyone involved in farming to identify and manage risks in order to prevent unnecessary deaths and serious injury.

The summer months are particularly busy on farms, with long hours of hard, high-risk work, usually involving tractors and machinery.

Major causes of injury and death include;

- Vehicles and machinery.
- Livestock.
- Falls from height/objects falling.
- Tiredness/hurry.

The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) statistics over this 10 year period indicate the major causes of death and injury are as follows:

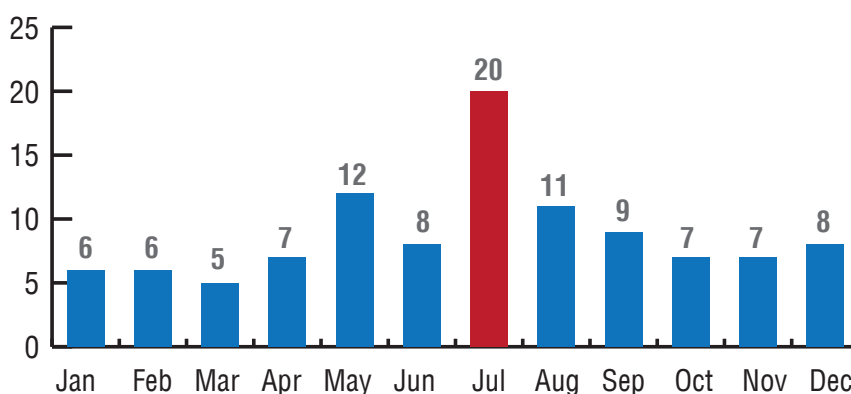
- Vehicles and machinery (52%).
- Livestock (19%).
- Falls from height (10%).

But we need to look deeper to identify the root causes.

Most fatalities and serious injuries involving vehicles and machinery can be traced back to poor maintenance of braking systems, mismatch of equipment, operator error, poor yard control/management, or simply fatigue.

Clearly, ensuring the correct machinery is used for the job, that machinery is maintained properly, that pedestrian movement in yards

Figure 1: Average farm workplace deaths in Ireland over 10 years.



is controlled and that the operator is fully competent and fit to do the work will go a long way in preventing such injuries and deaths.

Farmers and contractors should not underestimate the impact of excessively long working hours. Long hours can lead to long-term imbedded fatigue and mistakes that would not otherwise happen.

Farmers and contractors must consider the risks involved in each activity on the farm and put measures/controls in place to eliminate or control these risks.

Code of practice

An easy way to identify these risks

and appropriate control measures is to use the Farm Safety Code of Practice Risk Assessment document.

The Code has dedicated pages on harvesting and slurry spreading, which are particularly apt at this time of year.

While the operators of tractors and large machinery are obviously at risk, so too are those living on the farm, particularly very young children or senior members of the household.

Time spent reducing or eliminating risk is a small cost when balanced against the unimaginable grief which death or injury to any family member will cause.

Farm Safety Week 2022

Farm Safety Week 2022 takes place from Monday 18 to Friday 22 July. Each day has a particular theme. The week is a combined UK and Ireland event and is co-ordinated by the Farm Safety Foundation UK (also known as Yellow Wellies) supported by the UK National Farmers Union (NFU).

In Ireland, the week will be co-ordinated by the IFA Farm Families and Social Affairs Committee. Teagasc will be sup-

porting the week by placing messages on its social media in line with the daily themes.

This year's themes are;

- Monday 18 – Launch with statistics on farm accident trends.
- Tuesday 19 – Childhood safety.
- Wednesday 20 – Farm safety champions, farm accident survivors.
- Thursday 21 – Respiratory health.
- Friday 22 – Mental health awareness.