

Health and Safety on the Farm

There is a belief that farming is a 'healthy occupation' in comparison with other manual occupations because it is mostly carried out outdoors. In reality farmers have a poor health profile when compared to other occupations. A National Survey by Teagasc found that a serious injury occurred on 6% of drystock farms in the previous six years. The survey found that farms classified as 'fulltime' had over twice the level of injuries as 'part-time' ones. This may be a surprising finding as one would expect that part-time farmers with off-farm jobs would be under more work pressure.

The most common serious accidents on drystock farms are related to machinery. One in four fatal accidents on Irish farms is linked to tractors and vehicles (29%). Other machinery related fatal accidents account for one in five deaths. Livestock accounts for 14% or one in seven. Drowning in slurry or water and slurry gassing and falls account for 10% each. The remainder of fatal accidents – approx. 15% - come from falling objects or collapse of buildings, timber cutting and electrocution. Farm machinery causes nearly half of all deaths on farms. These areas are identifiable and accordingly are preventable.

Farmers must, by law, complete and implement a farm risk assessment. A Farm Safety Code of Practice (including a risk assessment document) has been issued to all farmers by the Health and Safety Authority (<http://www.hsa.ie>). The risk assessment document fulfils the legal requirement to complete a safety statement for farms with three or fewer employees. Aside from the legal requirement it may be well worthwhile to sit down and complete the booklet if there is some area of health and safety on the farm that has been overlooked. A book of Safe System of Work Plans is included in the farm safety code of practice pack. The purpose of this is to provide a quick and easy means of systematically revising your risk assessment regularly. The risk assessment can also be completed and revised electronically by logging onto: <http://www.farmsafely.com>. A server at this site stores data and operates the system, and is totally confidential.

One should also look after personal health as the risk of injury is higher if you suffer from poor health and stress. Have regular health checks -at least once a year - and practice health promoting activities such as physical exercise, good diet and also control weight and watch alcohol consumption. We might not get much sun but we should still manage exposure to sun by wearing sun protection. Of course we all should manage stress through better work organisation and put aside some time to relax!

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