

Health & Safety Update | July 2020

Welcome to Strutt & Parker's Farm Research Group Health & Safety Update. The quarterly Health & Safety Update is designed to assist you in ensuring that you are thinking about topical health and safety matters on your farm or estate. Health and safety is a vital part of any business operation.

This update comments on the Health & Safety Executive's annual workplace fatality figures and reminds employers of their legal duty to display the approved health and safety poster in the workplace. It provides a refresher of general safety matters affecting farm and estate work during the harvest period, and considers how to minimise the risk of COVID-19 affecting the workforce. The update also explains the recent safety alert issued for air suspension systems on vehicles, before reminding employers of how to safely use aluminium phosphide as a highly toxic but effective substance for pest control.

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HEALTH & SAFETY EXECUTIVE'S FIGURES BITTERSWEET

The Health & Safety Executive has released its annual workplace fatality figures for the 2019-20 year.

These show that 111 workers were killed in the 12-month period, with agriculture accounting for 20 fatalities. While this represents a significant fall on the 39 farming-related deaths of the previous year and the lowest level on record, it still comprises 18% of all workplace fatalities when the agriculture sector employs only around 1% of the total UK workforce.

The main kinds of fatal accident for workers included falls from height, strikes by moving vehicles or objects, being trapped by something collapsing or overturning, and contact with moving machinery.

What should have been a step in the right direction for agriculture was made bittersweet by the recent death of a two-year-old in a slurry-related accident on a Lancashire farm.

The latest set of HSE figures decrease the fatal injury rate (the rate of fatal injuries per 100,000 workers employed) for agriculture to 5.96, although this remains well above the comparative figure for the construction sector of 1.74 and the overall industry rate of 0.34.

It is also worth noting that while many aspects of agricultural work have continued amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of fatal injuries to workers in Great Britain in February and March was much lower than both the previous year and five-year average, coinciding with the time that COVID-19 was starting to have an impact on the economy.

HEALTH & SAFETY POSTERS

Employers have a legal duty under the Health & Safety Information for Employees Regulations 1989 to display the approved poster in a prominent position in every workplace, or to provide each worker with a copy of the approved leaflet outlining British health and safety law.

The statutory poster was revised in 2009, replacing the 1999 version (left hand poster) but is still evident across many farms and estates today. The revised posters (right hand poster) should all have been replaced by **5 April 2014**, failure to display the correct poster is a breach of the regulations.



HARVEST HEALTH & SAFETY

With the outset of harvest upon us, now is a good time to remind farm and estate workers about general safety matters affecting their work:

- Ensure effective communication by instructing all workers to carry their fully charged mobile telephones at all times, using the what3words app and ensuring emergency numbers including 105 for the local distribution network operator are available.
- Maintain a safe working environment by tidying the workshop, keeping floors, gangways and exits free of obstructions, avoiding reversing where possible, opening the rear window of the tractor and switching off stereos in the farm yard.
- Exercise caution when operating hydraulic tailgates of grain trailers, particularly after driving from bright sunlight into dark grain store environments.
- Do not interfere with or misuse any safety equipment provided in the interests of health and safety; where PPE is provided, use it, look after it, and inform the Safety Officer if it becomes faulty, damaged or needs replacing.
- Provide all workers with information on the location of first aid kits, defibrillators, accident books, assembly points, fire extinguishers and electric isolation points.
- Inform workers about who the qualified first aiders are, how to record any accidents and injuries, and who to report any machinery damage or defects to.
- Provide workers with a copy of the farm's working health and safety policy, risk assessments and safe systems of work, and request that they sign to confirm they have read and will comply with them.
- Give workers a map showing the locations of overhead and underground services and public rights of way.
- If taking on temporary workers, assess their competence and check what certificates they hold and copy them.
- Ensure all workers have the necessary information, instruction, training and supervision in the use of machinery and equipment and are confident to ask if something is damaged, broken, missing or in need of repair or replacement.
- Ensure that machinery servicing and maintenance, including record keeping, is up to date; particularly check the condition of grain trailers and ensure the brakes have been tested.
- Instruct all workers in the use of SAFE STOP, requiring drivers to apply the handbrake, put controls in neutral, switch off the engine and remove the key whenever they leave the seat or anyone else approaches the vehicle.



CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

With harvest getting underway, now is the time to consider how farms and estates can continue to operate as safely as possible and put appropriate control measures in place to minimise the risk of COVID-19 affecting the workforce.

Section 2 of the Health & Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 requires every employer to “ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all his employees.” The Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (as amended) require risk assessment identifying what could cause illness in the workplace, how likely it is that someone could be harmed and how seriously, and the actions to eliminate the hazard or control the risk.

The key objective of risk assessment for COVID-19 must be to avoid the workplace becoming a place of transmission. ‘Covid-secure’ Government guidance must be abided by insofar as it relates to agriculture, a COVID-19 risk assessment must be carried out and signage displayed to confirm the workplace is COVID-secure.

The following control measures should be considered and deployed where reasonably practicable to do so:

Work areas:

- Physically arrange the work area to keep employees two metres apart.
- Use screens or barriers to separate employees from each other.
- Mark work areas using floor paint or tape to maintain social distancing.
- Provide signage to remind employees to maintain social distancing.
- Use back-to-back or side-to-side working, rather than face-to-face.
- Restrict the rotation of employees between work areas and equipment.
- Reduce the number of people in high traffic areas.
- Introduce pedestrian walkways to allow employees to maintain social distancing when moving around the workplace.
- Where safe to do so, change or redesign tasks so they only need one employee to complete them.
- Ensure ventilation systems are set to operate continuously on 100% fresh supply with limited recirculation.
- Frequent cleaning of regularly touched objects and surfaces such as grease guns, pillar drills, grinders and lathes.



✓ We have carried out a **COVID-19 risk assessment** and shared the results with the people who work here

Vehicles and machinery:

- Avoid multiple occupancy vehicles – vehicles should not be shared.
- Avoid carrying passengers in tractors and combine harvesters.
- Restrict the rotation of employees between vehicles and machinery.
- Ventilate vehicles to increase the flow of air by opening a window.
- Ensure hand wipes and sanitiser are available in all vehicles and machinery.
- Frequent cleaning of regularly touched objects and surfaces such as vehicle keys, door handles and fuel pumps.
- Ensure regular cleaning of vehicles, in particular between different users.
- Encourage delivery and collection drivers to stay in their vehicles.

Common areas and welfare facilities:

- Stagger start, finish and break times to reduce pressure on toilets, break rooms, welfare and changing facilities.
- Physically move tables and chairs so they are at least two metres apart.
- Use outside areas for breaks if locations are suitable and it is safe to do so.
- Frequent cleaning of regularly touched objects and surfaces such as kettles, microwaves, chairs and tables.
- Adequate waste facilities and more frequent rubbish collection.

Good hygiene:

- All persons displaying symptoms of coronavirus should self-isolate and stay at home.
- Awareness of common symptoms: onset of a new continuous cough and/or a high temperature of 37.8°C or above.
- Clinically extremely vulnerable employees must not work outside the home.
- Employees at increased risk must be offered the safest available roles.
- Provide handwashing facilities including running water, soap and paper towels.
- Provide hand sanitiser in addition to washing facilities.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water or use hand sanitiser regularly.
- Use signs to increase awareness of good handwashing techniques.
- Practice social distancing wherever possible including arriving at and departing from work.
- Provide regular reminders on avoiding touching your face and to cough/sneeze into your arm.

Information and guidance:

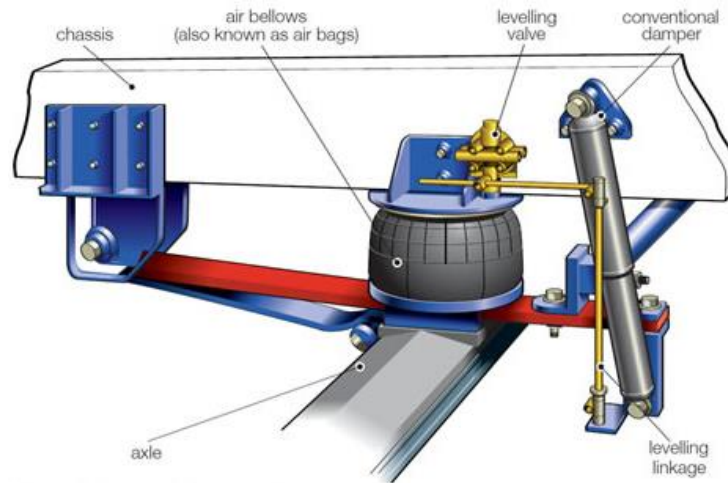
- Share information with your employees as soon as possible.
- Consult with employees by listening and talking to them about how the COVID-19 risk will be managed. Employees are often the best people to understand the risks in the workplace and will have a view on how to work safely. Involving them in making decisions shows that you take their health and safety seriously and, at its most effective, creates a culture where relationships between employers and employees are based on collaboration, trust and joint problem solving.
- Actively listen to feedback from your employees and act on their concerns.
- Agree how you will look after someone who falls ill at work. Do you need to isolate them until they can go home or receive professional medical attention? Where will that be? What do you need to do to clean afterwards?
- Develop a business continuity contingency plan which identifies how the operations of the business will continue in the event of one or more employees developing symptoms of COVID-19. Who will operate the combine and sprayer? Who has the necessary training and experience? Who is telehandler trained?

PPE:

- Where you already using PPE in your work activity to protect against non COVID-19 risks (e.g. grain dust, welding fume), you should continue to do so.
- COVID-19 is a different type of risk to the risks you normally face in the workplace, and needs to be managed through social distancing and good hygiene, not through the use of additional PPE.
- There are some circumstances when wearing a face covering may be marginally beneficial (e.g. changing wheels, tuberculosis testing of livestock).
- Evidence suggests that wearing a face covering does not protect you, but may protect others if you are infected but have not developed symptoms.
- A face covering needs to cover your mouth and nose.
- If wearing a face covering:
 - Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water or use hand sanitiser before putting a face covering on and after removing it.
 - Avoid touching your face or face covering to prevent contamination.
 - Change your face covering if it becomes damp or is touched.
 - Change and wash your face covering daily.

AIR SUSPENSION SYSTEMS

The Health & Safety Executive recently issued a safety alert for air suspension systems on vehicles, following investigation of several serious incidents involving collapse of inadequately supported vehicles and unintended rupture of components. Vehicles are commonly fitted with air suspension systems, involving inflated rubber bellows (airbags) being supplied with air from the vehicle's air compressor. These take the place of conventional springs at each wheel or axle and ensure a consistent ride height, regardless of the load being carried.



Hazards include:

- Clearance suddenly and unexpectedly changing due to a drop in air pressure, automatic movements or air bellows rupturing or deflating. This presents a crushing hazard to those working in a position where they may become trapped, e.g. underneath the vehicle or between the wheel and chassis.
- Work on pressurised systems resulting in violent ejection of parts under pressure and failure of components which may become projectiles.

Those working on vehicles with air suspension systems should:

- Ensure tasks are adequately planned and follow the safe system of work.
- Use the necessary equipment to undertake the job safely.
- Prevent movement of air suspension, either by deflating the system or using suitably rated props or stands to prevent the chassis lowering.
- Exhaust the air from the air suspension system before working on it.
- Isolate the air suspension system by physical disconnection of the air supply before working on it.
- Isolate lifting axles which may otherwise move without notice.
- Carry out a visual check of the condition of the air suspension system.

Under no circumstances should air suspension be relied upon to maintain a vehicle's ride height or position while people gain access to areas where they may become trapped.

VERMIN CONTROL

From 26th November 2015, farmers and gamekeepers were required to hold a certificate of competence to use aluminium phosphides to control rabbits, moles and rats in their burrows, even if they have had previous training. The use of aluminium phosphide products has long been governed and restricted. However, the new rules introduced a legal requirement for users to be certified under the Plant Protection Products (Sustainable Use) Regulations 2012. Users are now required to hold a City & Guilds NPTC Level 2 Award in the Safe Use of Aluminium Phosphide for Vertebrate Pest Control.

The qualification has been developed for pest controllers, gamekeepers and farmworkers who use aluminium phosphide to control rabbits, moles and rats, and addresses the requirement that users must hold a recognised certificate for the use and purchasing of the product.

Aluminium phosphide is a highly toxic substance and the phosphine gas which it liberates is lethal to all animals at low concentrations in the air in nests, warrens and burrows. Lack of alternatives, especially for rabbits and moles, has led to an increased reliance on aluminium phosphide, which is also the only non-anticoagulant poison for the control of rats.

Aluminium phosphide is the most toxic substance used for controlling pests in the UK and as such, deserves "special attention" to protect both people and non-target animals. The stewardship scheme, which has an independent pest control register, has been adopted by a network of trainers to provide courses leading to City & Guilds, Royal Society for Public Health and Lantra qualifications.

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