

Ceres Rural – Health & Safety Bulletin

Introduction

Welcome to Ceres Rural's Health & Safety Bulletin. Each quarter, we update you on industry news, topical issues, and safety alerts with the aim of supporting you in achieving best practice on your farm or estate. This edition looks at the new requirement of the Red Tractor Certified Standards to show a health and safety policy as part of the farm assessment. Following Storms Arwen and Barra, we highlight that emergency tree work is dangerous and should only be undertaken by experienced professionals. Farm and estate staff require competency and certification in various areas – winter is a good time to review training records and requirements for your team. The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) have issued a safety notice regarding the use of wheeled loading shovels – we consider the agricultural implications of these machines. Our update also looks at the increased risk of fertiliser theft and steps for safe and secure storage. Finally, we examine two recent prosecutions and the lessons learnt for rural businesses.



Red Tractor Standards

Version 5 of the Red Tractor Certified Standards published across all sectors in November 2021 includes the new requirement to show a health and safety policy as part of the farm assessment.

Implementing the change in the arable sector, Chair of the crops board, Guy Smith, commented that, "having such a policy is a legal requirement, but many felt that given recent farm fatality figures it was right that this scheme checks it is truly in place." In fact, the Red Tractor standards now go over and above the requirement of the Health & Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 to have a written health and safety policy where the business has five or more employees, to insist that all assured farms must have this in place.



The standards state that a health and safety policy must be in place and effectively communicated to all relevant workers, using a language and learning style that ensures all workers understand the information. The change builds upon the existing personnel standards which require systems to be in place to ensure all personnel are effectively trained and deemed competent to carry out the activities they are required to do, that records of training must be kept, and that the performance and competence of employees must be regularly reviewed and refresher training implemented as required. Labour providers must be licenced via the Gangmasters & Labour Abuse Authority with evidence in place for worker competence, training, and legality to work in the UK.

Contact Ceres Rural today to find out how we can assist you in implementing a health and safety policy for your business.

Emergency Tree Work



Storms Arwen and Barra have caused widespread damage in recent weeks and have highlighted that emergency tree work is dangerous and should only be undertaken by experienced professionals.

The HSE published a bulletin on 14th December 2021 which confirmed that in the past 12 months, eight people have been killed by falling branches or trees.

It cautions that emergency tree work is complex with many risks, including the tree moving unexpectedly, or the need to carry out work in difficult conditions.

The planning and execution of such works must be undertaken by a competent person who has the necessary training in emergency tree works such as assisted felling, windblown and part blown trees and emergency planning, suitable past experience, use of equipment fit for purpose, and wearing of relevant personal protective equipment (PPE).

Building on this, the HSE warns farmers to avoid carrying out the work themselves without the necessary experience, despite the inevitable pressures of fallen trees on livestock fences and getting in the way of arable field operations.

Arboriculture lead at the HSE, Christopher Maher, said, “while fallen trees due to adverse weather conditions can cause lots of disruption and it can be tempting to carry out emergency tree work, we want to warn people against attempting this high-risk activity. Fallen trees can be unstable and weigh a significant amount, with inadvertent movement having fatal results. There are also high risks associated with the use of chainsaws and mechanised methods of removal, such as grapple saws and tree shears, are preferred.”

The Forest Industry Safety Accord added that, “to deal with windblow situations, use mechanical assistance whenever possible. Mechanised systems should be considered as a safer alternative to chainsaw work... this works needs to be carefully planned and risk assessed.” FISA also point out the danger of working in proximity to overhead power lines which may subsequently have been re-energised, and only doing so in close cooperation with the Network Operator who can de-energise, isolate and earth the system.

Competency & Certification

Farm and estate staff are required to perform diverse roles using a range of tools and equipment, some of which require formal certification by a recognised training body. Such certification provides a basic level of safety and operational skills to ensure safe use for the operator, the environment and the employer.



The onset of winter presents a good opportunity to review training records and check what certificates are held by your staff. Copies should be taken and held in the health and safety file, refresher dates should be noted and training arranged (subject to Coronavirus restrictions) before the expiry date. If appropriate certification is not held, staff must not be allowed to use the plant or machinery unless under the direct supervision of a competent person who holds the appropriate certificate.

The Health & Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 requires the employer to provide information, instruction, training and supervision as necessary to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety at work of your employees. The Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require employers to provide adequate health and safety training and identify situations where training is particularly important, e.g. on recruitment, exposure to new or increased risks, and where existing skills need updating.

Wheeled Loading Shovels



In October 2021, the HSE issued a safety notice to remind duty holders who use these machines of the need to fully assess and actively manage the risk of vehicle-pedestrian collisions.

There have been nine fatal vehicle-pedestrian collisions in the past four years involving loading shovels. Although six of these were in the waste and recycling sector and the rest involved wood chip, the principles particularly when pushing-up or out-loading grain, or manoeuvring seed and fertiliser bags, are very similar.

Some of the reported fatalities were due to poor forward visibility, while others resulted from reversing. Larger capacity buckets had been fitted to some machines, further reducing forward visibility. Other blind spots are caused by the engine at the rear and the cab pillars, and these can significantly reduce the operator's ability to see pedestrians and, to a lesser extent, other vehicles. Grain stores can be dark environments and visibility can be impeded when emerging into lighter, sunnier environments.

Manufacturers and other specialist suppliers have been developing camera systems for some time to address the forward visibility problems with these machines. However, until these are proven and widely available, the only effective control measure currently is strict segregation of vehicles and pedestrians.

Before undertaking such work, you should review your risk assessments and consider:

- Safe site:
 - Rigorous segregation between pedestrians and vehicles.
 - Review layout, barriers and one-way systems.
 - Lorry drivers to remain in their own vehicles at all times.
 - Nobody in the grain store except the loading shovel operator.
- Safe vehicle:
 - Critically assess visibility.
 - Consider fitting additional mirrors or cameras if necessary.
 - Use additional aids where modifications reduce forward visibility.
 - Daily checks of windows, mirrors, flashing beacons and reversing alarms.
- Safe driver:
 - Operators should be trained and competent.
 - Training should cover adjustments to seats, mirrors and visibility aids.
 - Understand the optimum travel or carry position of the bucket.
 - Consider if non-drivers appreciate the limited view from the cab.

Fertiliser Storage

High global gas prices, shutdowns of manufacturing plants, shipping and haulage delays, product shortages and the rising value of on-farm stocks, are increasing the risk of fertiliser theft from farms. Nitrogen-based fertiliser can be used for illegitimate purposes, so anyone handling these products has a responsibility to provide secure storage and remain vigilant.



The National Counter Terrorism Office's Fertiliser Security Five Point Plan includes:

- Use a Fertiliser Industry Assurance Scheme (FIAS) approved supplier.
- Store in a secure building or sheeted stack, away from public view.
- Carry out regular stock checks and immediately reporting any losses to Police.
- Avoid leaving fertiliser in fields overnight or for longer period of time.
- Remember it is illegal to sell ammonium nitrate without correct documentation.

In addition to the above, fertiliser should be checked for hazardous or oxidising symbols, and should be stored separately from all incompatible materials that could be sources of heat, fire or explosion, such as oil or gas stores. Ensure there are no naked flames or smoking near stored fertiliser, and take care that damaged bags cannot topple over.

For stability, interlock the bags and only stack to a maximum of three bags high. Keep a gap of one metre between stacks and the walls and roof of the building to allow for full inspection around the perimeter. Ammonium nitrate should be stored in a dedicated, clean, well-ventilated building that is constructed from materials that do not burn.

When handling fertiliser bags, use the correct equipment and secure loads when transporting from the farm to the field. Do not exceed the safe working load of your machinery when lifting bags, and ensure that forklift tines have rounded edges or secured metal sleeves. Make sure that the lifting hoops on the bags are correctly placed centrally on the tines. Drive slowly and smoothly, especially on uneven ground, and do not lift any damaged bags.

Clean up fertiliser spillages as soon as possible to prevent them from reaching any drains or watercourses. Finally, observe the Dangerous Substances (Notification & Marking of Sites) Regulations 1990 which may involve notifying the HSE and/or Fire Brigade where certain types and volumes of fertiliser are stored. Speak to Ceres Rural today for further guidance on these requirements.

Enforcement Activity

The following are examples of recent prosecutions, and conclusions for safe practice on farms and estates:

Company prosecuted after worker injures hand in lathe

A UK brick manufacturer was fined after a worker's hand was entangled and wrapped around the rotating shaft on a lathe, resulting in surgical amputation below the elbow. The maintenance engineer was in the process of polishing a metal shaft as it rotated in a manual lathe, using an emery cloth directly by hand and while wearing gloves.

The HSE found failures in the arrangements and controls for the task performed. The risk assessment in place was not suitable and sufficient because it did not properly assess or address entanglement risk associated with the direct manual application of emery cloth to the workpiece or the use of gloves. There was inadequate training, instruction and supervision to ensure the risks were prevented.

The company pleaded guilty to breaching Section 2(1) of the Health & Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and was fined £530,000 and ordered to pay costs of £4,548.

Lesson Learnt: Those in control of work have a responsibility to assess risk and devise safe methods of working in which their employees should then be instructed and trained.

Sawmill fined after worker's finger is severed in machinery

A sawmill was fined after a worker injured his finger when his hand came into contact with the moving parts of a machine while examining the moving parts at the rear of a saw to check why it had been cutting inaccurately. The saw remained in operation while he did so, and his glove became caught in the moving parts causing him to sever his index finger on his left hand.

The HSE concluded the company failed to ensure that access to the cross-cut saw's dangerous moving parts was prevented by the use of a guard, and failed to deliver adequate training to its employees.

The company pleaded guilty to breaching Regulation 11(1) of the Provision & Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 and Section 2(1) of the Health & Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and was fined £40,000 and ordered to pay costs of £15,594.

Lesson Learnt: Employers should ensure they properly assess and apply effective control measures to minimise the risk from dangerous parts of machinery. The Provision & Use of Work Equipment Regulations apply to both static and mobile work equipment in both agricultural and all other work settings.



Get in Touch

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