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Rural Industries Research & Development Corporation

Farm Health and Safety Under Scrutiny

Small farm vehicles, such as two wheel motorcycles and four wheeled All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVs), have become important to most agricultural production systems in Australia. There has been a steady increase in the number of ATVs in use on farms over the past decade. More recently, a number of All-Terrain Utility vehicles (ATUs) have emerged as having a role in agricultural and horticultural enterprises. Work previously undertaken by horses, tractors, two wheel motorcycles and utilities is now being undertaken by ATVs and ATUs.

A recent publication developed by the RIRDC-managed Farm Health and Safety Joint Research Venture titled "ATV Injury on Australian Farms – The Facts – 2007" (Facts and Figures on Farm Health and Safety Series No. 8) (Pub No 07-149) showed that 66.5 percent of farmers reported that they owned at least one ATV. The maximum number of ATVs on any one farm is 12. Motorcycle sales figures record that a total of 17,068 ATVs were sold across Australia in 2005 for on and off farm use. This reflects a 15.8 percent increase from 2004 sale figures.

There is a growing concern over the number of deaths and serious injuries occurring in association with ATVs used in both agricultural work and recreational use both in Australia and overseas.

Recent information indicates that there are more than 10 Australian deaths, primarily in the agricultural and horticultural industries, associated with ATV use each year. The ATV Deaths Register, established by the National Farm Injury Data Centre, has identified a total of 76 ATV-associated fatalities that have occurred on and off farms throughout Australia from July 2000 to December 2005. The greatest number of fatalities (19) occurred in NSW. ATVs were also associated with around 13.5% of child-related farm incidents. It was found that the type of injuries presented by ATV riders were significantly more likely to result in hospital admission (70%) than two wheeled motorcycles. It was also found that the type of injuries were more severe and included crushing, internal organ injury and amputation.

Apart from safe riding practice, wearing a helmet is seen as a significant mechanism for reducing the risks associated with ATV use.

This is an informative and thought-provoking publication that will be of interest to deer farmers. ATVs are widely used on deer farms and deer farmers have not been immune from spills and rollovers. Fortunately, while some machines have been written off, the worst injuries reported have only been sprains and breaks.

The report is downloadable free from the RIRDC website at <http://www.rirdc.gov.au/reports/HCC/07-149.pdf>

Recent publications in this series and available on the website include:
ATV Injury on Australian Farms – The Facts – 2007 – (Pub No 07-149)
Occupational Health and Safety Risk in the Australian Dairy Industry – (Pub No 07-148)
Health and Safety in Older Farmers in Australia – (Pub No 07-150)
Traumatic Deaths in Australia Agriculture – (Pub No 07-151)

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