



This summary is to help employers, workers and contractors in the cotton sector understand their legal **Work Health and Safety (WHS)** responsibilities and to easily access important information to help meet these requirements. A more complete guide can be found here: <https://rirdc.infoservices.com.au/items/14-O88>

Work Health and Safety legislation has been adopted in both New South Wales and Queensland resulting in laws that are almost identical.

Responsibilities

Employers (Persons Conducting a Business or Undertaking - PCBU) and workers (employees & contractors) all have responsibilities for a safe workplace.

The critical responsibility of an **employer (PCBU)** is to provide a safe workplace and ensure the safety of all those who work or visit the farm.

In the same way, **workers** (employees & contractors) have responsibility to:

- take reasonable care for their own health and safety and for that of others
- comply with reasonable instruction and cooperating with policies and procedures (e.g. training, use of personal protective equipment).

Case Study - Contract Cotton Picking

A backpacker was driving a cotton picker that had been modified to pick up cotton on the ground around modules. The driver had dumped a load of cotton into a module builder and driven off with the basket raised. Other workers attempted to alert the driver by waving and using the 2-way radio. The driver reportedly became confused and continued to drive away with the basket raised.

The picker increased speed and started to roll into a table drain. As the picker began to roll, the driver panicked, leaving his seat and jumping off the picker platform breaking a leg.

The WHA was notified of the event in compliance with WHS requirements. A WHS inspector visited the farm and interviewed the farm manager, contractor, co-workers and the injured worker.

An assessment of the farm's WHS system was undertaken including relevant risk assessments, control measures and whether a safety induction had been undertaken and safety records maintained (verified by the injured worker, co-workers, contractor and farm manager).

Despite the injury to the driver, the WHS inspector verified that an effective WHS system was in place, that safety inductions were completed and relevant records were on hand. A Corrective Action Plan was issued that required the retro fitment of seat belts to pickers and no further action was required.

This case study illustrates the importance and benefits of having a system in place and ensuring that it is implemented. Not only does it reduce incidents and lost productivity, it also strengthens compliance with legal WHS requirements and assists in preventing further prosecution and fines.

HOW DO WE MANAGE WHS?

An effective approach to [Managing Risks to Health and Safety](#) consists of:

- (a) Identifying hazards
- (b) Assessing risks
- (c) Controlling risks
- (d) Reviewing control measures
- (e) Keeping records of the steps you take

You are required to develop a **WHS plan** that brings together all of the parts necessary to address safety in a systematic way and meets your WHS legal requirements.

In developing your farm WHS plan, you must include the following:

- *Management commitment* - clearly outline your own responsibilities and those of any workers; provide resources to meet those responsibilities; get involved
- *Consultation* - involve your workers when identifying and addressing safety issues
- *Management of hazards and risk* - identify tasks that are a risk for workers, take action to control these risks and develop simple procedures to manage risks where they cannot be eliminated
- *Training and instruction* - train workers in safe work procedures and make sure they are followed
- *Reporting safety* - have a system for reporting hazards, near-misses and incidents; act upon these
- *Return to work and workers compensation* - make sure all workers are covered by a worker's compensation policy with an injury notification system in place and return to work program

There is also a range of other issues that need to be included in your WHS Plan such as confined spaces (e.g. irrigation pumps), electrical safety, emergency plans, hazardous chemicals, safety induction for new workers, contractor management, working at heights, plant and equipment etc.

WHAT ARE THE MAJOR RISKS?

The injury evidence indicates the high-risk issues on cotton farms include: aircraft (crashes), electricity (overhead powerlines - pickers, module builders, spray rigs), excavators, farm utes (collisions), irrigation channels (drowning), module builders (falls/ crush injury/ suffocation), pumps (entanglement) and quads (collisions/ falls/ rollover).

WHAT RECORDS DO WE NEED TO KEEP?

Record keeping is essential to maximise the effectiveness of your safety system and also to provide concrete evidence of how you have managed safety which will be required if an injury event occurs. There are a number of records that should be maintained on cotton farms (e.g. farm WHS plan including all induction, training etc). Examples of all registers required for record keeping on cotton farms are available at the [Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety website](#).

WHERE CAN I GET MORE HELP WITH WHS?

The most complete source of industry information for cotton growers is available from the [Cotton Australia \(myBMP\)](#) website.

Further industry specific information is available from:

[Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety](#)

[Cotton Research & Development Corporation](#)

Additional assistance can also be gained from your relevant state / territory Work Health Authority on the following numbers. Both NSW and Queensland will provide free assistance to help you with WHS issues:

WorkCover NSW - contact@workcover.nsw.gov.au

Workplace Health and Safety QLD - [WHS Enquiry Form](#)