

Farmers making a plan for safety

Written by Sheq Management

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Safety compliance is non-negotiable in high-risk industries, particularly the farming sector. We speak to Advocate Hendrik Terblanche, MD at Legricon, about the safety regulations that govern the agricultural industry

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), there are more than 1,3-million workers in the agricultural industry, worldwide. The ILO estimates that, globally, 170 000 agricultural workers are killed each year, due to risks associated with the farming industry.

Agriculture is one of the top three high-risk industries with the most injuries and fatalities, along with construction and mining. Other high-risk industries are forestry and transport.

Guy Ryder, director general of ILO, says that many agricultural businesses, particularly in African countries, are not willing to invest in better safety equipment and training.

Risks of working in agriculture

Terblanche, says that, in South Africa, agricultural work involving heavy machinery and equipment is often performed by unskilled workers resulting in injuries and death.



The common risks associated with working in agriculture include exposure to extreme weather, fatigue, noise, vibrations, contact with animals and exposure to hazardous chemicals and substances.

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“While some of the high-risk industries have industry-specific health and safety legislation, there is no specific legislation for the agricultural industry, which has to comply with the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA),” he advises.

Regulations to ensure worker safety

The OHSA applies to a broad range of workplaces, from shops and offices to factories, power stations and large chemical process plants.

Terblanche explains that the legislation deals with the problem of a one-size-fits-all approach by placing general obligations on an employer. These are contained in section 8 of the OHSA.

“The main principle is that the employer must provide and maintain a working environment that is safe and without risk to the health of employees, by identifying hazards in the workplace and implementing reasonable practical precautions to protect employees and other persons against such hazards.

“Often OSHA regulations that would apply on farms are those that would apply in factories. For example, the Regulations for Hazardous Chemical Substances for the use of pesticides and the Driven Machinery Regulations, as lifting equipment and other driven machinery are often used on farms.”

Possible causes of non-compliance



Terblanche notes: “It will be quite costly for a farmer in an isolated rural location to obtain the

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services of an approved inspection authority to conduct hygiene surveys, or perform a pressure test on a mobile compressor. As a result, there would be a high instance of non-compliance to the legal requirements in the sector.”

He continues: “Other factors currently affecting the industry – such as drought, livestock and crop diseases, minimum wages and security risks – add further pressure to the cash flow of many private farmers, which could result in limited funds being available to spend on health and safety compliance.”

Terblanche urges farmers to ensure basic compliance by not risk operating without:

- Personal protective equipment for workers – which is available at most farming suppliers and co-ops;
- A first-aid kit – which is widely available; and
- At least a few portable fire extinguishers – particularly where flammable liquids, such as petrol and diesel, are used and stored.

Terblanche concludes: “Since the farming sector makes use of unskilled labour, the introduction of health and safety training should be a starting point for farmers.

“Although the remoteness of farms could be a challenge for some compliance requirements, the Department of Labour has a booklet (available in Afrikaans and English) discussing health and safety in the agricultural sector. This could be a useful starting point for many farmers,” he concludes.