

SAFER: A Practical Approach to Risk Management

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Managing hazards is a critical part of building and maintaining a farm safety system. It underpins and shapes many elements of day-to-day operations – from the operating procedures you need, the training you provide to staff, maintenance, and personal protective equipment required. Effective hazard control helps determine what actions are necessary to keep people safe.

The prospect of doing risk assessments can at times seem like a burden. It might seem like they take too long and you don't have time – just another layer of paperwork that slows things down. It may also seem a bit daunting if you think they require specialised knowledge or training and the paperwork is hard to understand. As a result, they're often left until something goes

wrong – when in reality, doing them up front saves time, money, and serious harm.

To help simplify the risk management process, Dairy Australia has developed the SAFER approach – a practical, step-by-step method to help identify hazards, reduce risk and implement effective controls. A range of supporting resources are available in the Farm Safety Manual and on The People in Dairy website to guide you through each stage.

Let's break down each stage of the SAFER approach, showing how it can be used to identify hazards, assess risk, take action, and maintain a safer working environment.



SEE IT – Spot the hazard

The first step is to go on a hazard hunt. Walk around your farm and observe what could potentially cause harm. Consider things like:

- Structures and machinery
- Chemicals and fuels
- Electricity, ladders, and noise
- Livestock, terrain, and weather
- Human factors like fatigue, stress, and workforce age

Also think about what's changed recently – new tasks, equipment, or weather conditions can all affect the level of risk.

To help guide this process, the Farm Safety Manual includes detailed modules on 14 common hazard topics, complete with self-assessments, checklist and other templates to help identify what you are looking for.



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ASSESS IT – Decide how risky it is

Once a hazard is identified, the next step is to assess the likelihood of something going wrong and the potential consequences. Key questions to ask include:

- Who could be harmed and how?
- What could happen, and how bad would it be?
- How likely is it to happen?
- What's already in place to reduce the risk?

1. Estimating the most serious consequence that could reasonably occur (e.g. first aid, lost time, permanent disability, or fatality).
2. Rating the likelihood of that outcome – is it almost certain, or going to be very rare?

This gives a risk score (1–25) that guides the next steps.

Use the Risk Assessment Matrix to determine a risk rating. This involves:

Most Serious Consequence What Harm will be the outcome	Likelihood of the Injury/Incident occurring				
	A Almost Certain	B Likely	C Possible	D Unlikely	E Rare
Fatality	1	2	4	7	11
Permanent Disability	3	5	8	12	16
Lost time injury	6	9	13	17	20
Medical treatment injury	10	14	18	21	23
First Aid	15	19	22	24	25

Supporting resources such as step-by-step guides in the Farm Safety Manual can help you work through this process. Codes of Practice and guidance material from WorkSafe Qld and SafeWork NSW provide a range of information on specific risk and how to manage them.



FIX IT – Take action to control the risk

Once the risk level is known, you can choose the best control measures. Ask yourself:

- What are we already doing to reduce this risk?
- Are the existing controls adequate?
- Do the controls protect everyone exposed to the hazard?

Use your risk rating to decide what action is needed and how urgently:

Risk Rating	Acceptance guide	What to do	Time Frame
Extreme 1 – 7	Not acceptable	Stop work. Isolate or eliminate the risk. Add to risk register.	Immediately
High 8 – 14	Generally not acceptable	Control the risk as soon as reasonably practicable. Monitor closely	Weekly/Ongoing
Medium 15 – 21	Generally acceptable	Use safe operating procedures. Monitor & supervise.	Within 3 – 6 months
Low 22 – 23	Acceptable	Managed with SOP*. Review	12 months

*Standard Operating Procedure



EVALUATE IT – Check if it's working

After a period of time it's important to check your controls and ensure they are working in the way you intended. Ask yourself:

- Has the level of risk actually decreased?
- Has a new risk been introduced?
- Are workers trained and following the procedures?

- Have there been any failures, near misses, or changes to the job?

Talk to your staff. If things aren't working as planned, reassess and adjust your approach. Have an action plan in place to make sure your controls remain effective.

Why it Matters?

Correctly identifying and assessing risk helps determine what actions are needed to keep people safe and the operation running smoothly. Done well, it can:

- Prevent or reduce the severity and cost of injuries and illnesses
- Support worker capability – when risks are well controlled, staff feel confident and can work more efficiently and without fear
- Boost productivity and quality – safe systems allow innovation to flourish and promote more consistent, higher-quality work

A strong risk assessment process is not just about compliance – it's about protecting your people, supporting your daily activities, and improving the long-term performance of your farm business. ■ ■



REVIEW IT – Keep It Up to Date

Risk management is not a one-time task. As part of your responsibilities under WHS law, you should review your controls regularly – at least annually, and any time there is:

- A change in equipment, process, or personnel
- An incident or near miss

- New information about the hazard or safer methods

Make sure your controls are still relevant, effective, and correctly implemented. Don't wait for an incident before acting.