

# COTTON FARM HEALTH AND SAFETY PROFILE - 2014 UPDATE

17<sup>th</sup> **australian COTTON** conference  
Our Fibre. Our Focus. Our Future

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## Aim

To provide the cotton industry with an update of the rates of work related serious injury and fatality to ensure that the most current and complete data possible is made available so that any priorities for and/or actions to improve cotton farm health and safety, can be based on up to date, comprehensive evidence.

## Method

Information was derived from several sources, including:

1. National Coroners Information System 2001 - 2013
2. National Workers' Compensation Data 2008 - 2012
3. Injury and near-miss incident self-reports

## Results and Discussion

National Coroners Information System

Data from 2001-2013 were accessed and analysed using several different strategies as the industry coding on the data is unreliable. From this process cases were classified as definitely occurring within cotton production or possibly occurring in cotton production. Where it was clear the fatality involved another commodity (e.g. cattle or grains), these cases were deleted from the analysis.

*Cotton Related* - seven cases were identified with mechanisms involving the

following:- aeroplane, cotton picker, dam drowning (child), farm ute, module builder (x2), water pump). Further data on the costs associated with the cotton related fatal incidents is being compiled.

*Potentially Cotton Related* - a further 28 possible cases involved properties where cotton is also grown were identified, with mechanisms being:- dams, earth moving equipment, firearms, forklifts, fuel store, motorcycles, quads, tractors, utes and being hit by objects (trees / equipment / structures).

Workers Compensation Data  
Workers Compensation data were accessed for the four year period 2008/09 to 2011/12. Data for 2011/12 is provisional and it is expected that further cases will be added in time.

### Number of Claims

- There is around 2,000 claims (0-4 days) and 3,000 (5+ days) per year across all Australian agriculture. Cotton represents less than 0.02% of all claims in agriculture for injuries less than 4 days and 5+ days.

### Claims by Nature of injury

- Sprains and strains accounted for around one-third of both short term (0-4 days) and serious (5+ days) injury claims.
- Open wounds (without amputation), followed by contusions, foreign bodies and fractures were common in claims of 0-4 days duration.

- For the more serious injuries (5+ days), apart from sprains and strains, fractures, open wounds and contusions were most common.

### Claims by Mechanism of injury

Being hit by moving objects, hitting stationary objects, falls and muscular stress (not carrying) were the major causes of short term (0-4 days) injury claims.

- A broader number of causal factors were involved in the more serious claims (5+ days) - falls from height (n=19), muscular stress (lifting), muscular stress (not carrying), hitting stationary objects, being hit by moving objects, vehicles and falls on same level.

### Claims by Time Lost and Cost

- Almost 2,100 weeks of work time were compensated in the cotton sector costing over \$5 million. This compared to 182,000 weeks across all Australian Agriculture, costing \$296 million.
- The relevant proportion of time lost and related compensation costs within the cotton sector represented approximately 0.1% of all time lost and costs in Australian agriculture.
- The median time (weeks) off for injuries in the cotton sector (1.35 weeks) was around one-third of that for the grains sector and less than half that of all agriculture.
- The median cost of all injuries was around \$2,150 in the

cotton sector, which was significantly lower than the median for the grains sector (\$4,275) and all Australian agriculture (\$7,100).

- The serious injury claims comprised between 97.8-99.4% of all time lost and 94.6-99.03% of all compensation costs in these years. This indicates that the major burden associated with injuries is those that are more severe in nature. Consequently, these should be prioritised for attention as key risks or hazards.

### Injury Self-Report

A series of cotton farm safety workshops were conducted with growers throughout the last six months of 2013. Workshop venues included - Boggabri, Bourke, Brookstead, Carroll, Dalby, Gunnedah, Moree, Mungindi, Narromine, St George (x2) and Theodore. In total approximately 80 growers attended these farm safety workshops.

At these workshops, growers were asked what have been the major types of injury on their properties in recent years. Growers reported that recent serious injury and near miss incidents involved motor vehicles, pickers, module builders, tractors, spray rigs and quads.

### Summary

Workers' Compensation Injury Data alone does not identify and provide detailed information on the mechanism and cause of injury compared to data from the National Coronial Database.

To more accurately provide the cotton growing industry with better health and safety

information and strategies to further reduce the cost of serious injury; better apportioning of Workers' Compensation injury claims to industry sectors (i.e. mixed farming operations) is required.

Better information is also required from cotton growers, to provide more detail about how serious injury and near-miss incidents occur. This would increase the rate of health and safety improvement, especially to obtain a significant reduction in serious injury, Workers' Compensation costs and claims.