

Safety and health alert

13/02 Two farm workers severely injured in crop fire

Incident

Two farm workers were severely injured as the result of a fire that moved through a crop of mature cereal. It is believed that efforts were being made by the workers to remove a truck that was partly loaded with grain from the path of the fire. Following unsuccessful attempts to move the truck, the utility vehicle in which they entered the paddock apparently failed to start and was abandoned.

Due to the now approaching fire front, the workers unsuccessfully attempted to outrun the fire. They received life-threatening burn injuries.

Both workers were evacuated for specialist medical treatment.

Factors

1. The possibility of crop fires and the associated risks and the direction and rate at which the fire front may travel.
2. Experience of workers to operate plant in adverse conditions when emergencies arise.

Recommendations

1. Ensure a clear plan has been worked out before the harvesting season commences, where all workers are aware of procedures to be adopted in the event of a fire, and their individual roles.
2. Fire extinguishing equipment should be readily available for use and located where it can be accessed from several directions, if the need arises.
3. All personnel likely to be required to use fire extinguishing equipment should be appropriately trained and provided with appropriate personal protective equipment, and are not to place themselves at risk in the event of a fire.
4. Farm vehicles should be adequately maintained with particular emphasis on exhaust systems and where practicable be fitted with appropriate fire extinguishing appliances.
5. Survival techniques need to be provided to all persons exposed to the risk of uncontrolled fires.

Further Information

Further information can be obtained from the WorkSafe internet site www.worksafe.wa.gov.au, or by contacting customer service on 1300 307 877 or email: safety@docep.wa.gov.au. A413288 Date: December 2002

