

Tuesday 9 February 2016

Quad bike fatalities prompt safety recommendations

Australian farmers are being urged to replace their quad bikes with safer alternatives, to prevent children under the age of 16 from riding them, and to wear helmets – all in the hopes of reducing the alarming number of quad bike deaths and injuries occurring in farming families each year.

These are among a series of recommendations in a new report from the University of Adelaide's Centre for Automotive Safety Research.

"Many quad bike riders have the belief that these vehicles are an all-terrain vehicle and therefore safe and stable to ride, but this leads to a false sense of security. In fact, quad bikes have become the leading cause of unintentional death on Australian farms," says the report's lead author, Research Fellow Dr Lisa Wundersitz.

"This study is the first of its kind to examine in-depth the circumstances of both fatal and non-fatal quad bike incidents in South Australia, and to evaluate the risks involved in such incidents. We hope our recommendations will help to save lives and prevent serious injury among agricultural workers and their children," she says.

The study, commissioned by SafeWork SA, used national and State data on quad bike accidents and involved interviews with injured riders and farmers.

From 2000–2014 there were 161 fatal quad bike accidents in Australia; eight of these occurred in South Australia. Nationwide, 16% of those killed were children under the age of 16; in South Australia, half of the fatalities were children. "We found 44% of the interviewed riders allowed children aged under 16 years to ride quad bikes either as riders or passengers," Dr Wundersitz says.

The researchers found that the majority of quad bike fatalities were on agricultural properties (59%). More than half (56%) of all quad fatalities involved the quad rolling over, causing crushing injuries. Head injuries were found in 38% of fatal cases, with helmets usually not worn by riders or passengers. In South Australia, none of the people killed on quad bikes were wearing helmets.

"Typically, quad bikes overturn when used on steep inclines, when they are carrying heavy loads, from turning too sharply, or simply because the vehicle has struck a hidden rock in the ground," Dr Wundersitz says.

This study found that one of the most common yet riskiest tasks undertaken by quad bike riders in farming is mustering or chasing livestock.

Among the report's recommendations are:

- encouraging farmers to trial and purchase side-by-side (two-seater utility) vehicles, which are more stable than quad bikes;
- regulations to prevent children under the age of 16 from riding adult-sized quad bikes;
- promoting the use of personal protective equipment, such as helmets; and
- developing helmets that provide much-needed protection, while being suitable for day-to-day work.

"One of the greatest challenges in addressing quad bike safety is convincing people that they can be dangerous in the first place – on family farms with young children in the mix, it is even more important as the consequences of a serious injury or fatality can be devastating," said SafeWork SA Executive Director Ms Marie Boland.

The full report can be found on the University of Adelaide's Centre for Automotive Safety Research [website](#).

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