



Media Release - SafeWork SA

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WARNING ON HARVEST INJURIES

As the state's annual grape harvest begins early, SafeWork SA is calling on farmers and labour hire companies to ensure that workers' safety is given high priority.

With hundreds of students, backpackers and professional pickers flocking to farms and vineyards across the state, SafeWork SA says it's crucial that farmers and labour hire companies that supply pickers have the appropriate workplace safety systems in place *before* the work begins.

"Even for the most experienced workers, farms can be dangerous places to work," says SafeWork SA Executive Director, Michele Patterson.

"However the risk of harm rises considerably when you factor in the presence of young and inexperienced workers, some of whom may understand limited English."

Under South Australian law, labour hire agencies supplying fruit pickers to farms also have a responsibility to ensure that all reasonably practicable measures are taken to protect workers health and safety.

This includes ensuring workers are aware of their safety rights and responsibilities, and that they know how to raise concerns relating to health and safety.

SafeWork SA says the most common hazards faced by fruit pickers include:

- falls from height
- manual handling
- forklifts
- chemicals
- heat exhaustion
- skin damage from exposure to the sun.
- visibility while working at night

"Falls are a threat to many pickers using ladders and platforms to reach fruit in trees, and many serious injuries occur from falls from ladders every year," Ms. Patterson says.

"Heavy, repetitive and awkward lifting by fruit pickers is also a major cause of injury that shows up in workers compensation statistics.

"Forklifts on larger farms and in warehouses also present a serious safety risk to workers in fruit picking operations," Ms. Patterson says.

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“These are one of the main sources of injury in the workplace and it is crucial that those working around them are aware of the dangers, and that systems are in place to ensure there are clearly defined walkways.

“Tractors are also a major concern,” Ms. Patterson says.

“These rank alongside forklifts as a major cause of harm, and it is important that only those with the proper training and experience drive tractors.

“For fruit pickers and other outdoor workers who spend long periods in the sun, it is crucial that they wear protective clothing, hats and sunscreen to prevent skin damage, which could lead to skin cancer.

“However, with some of this work also occurring after dark to avoid the daytime heat, there are safety issues surrounding visibility at night, both in the vineyards, and around vehicles and machinery,” Ms. Patterson says.

SafeWork SA has extensive information on farm safety available on its website:

www.safework.sa.gov.au.

Help is also available via its Telephone Help Centre on 1300 365 255 or 8303 0400 for mobile callers.

To report serious accidents or incidents, in the workplace call 1 800 777 209