



Farm Safety

A guide for seasonal and migrant workers.





Welcome.

Welcome to Victoria. The work of seasonal and migrant farm workers plays a crucial role in our agricultural economy. We thank you for the contribution you are making to our local communities.





The purpose of this guide.

This guide aims to provide information on essential health and safety requirements specific to farms and the horticulture industry. It also outlines the role that unions play in helping workers to understand their rights and responsibilities regarding health and safety. This guide covers:

- **Workplace safety**
- **Farm safety**



Who are we?

The Australian Workers' Union is a collective of workers standing together to gain better conditions for seasonal and migrant farm workers. All workers have the right to get home safely. We are more than 70,000 members taking action towards a fairer tomorrow.

We know that work environments in the horticulture industry can be dangerous. Completing farm work often requires heavy, powered machinery and specialised skills and training. That is why we work to make sure that you feel safe and supported throughout the entire time you work in Victoria.





Workplace safety

We take your safety at work seriously, and so does the law in Victoria.

WorkSafe Victoria is the state's health and safety regulator and manager of Victoria's workers compensation scheme. They aim to keep all workplaces healthy and safe, and to deliver high-quality care and treatment when workers are injured.

WorkSafe Victoria can offer information and support on issues relating to your safety at work. To contact them, visit:

www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/speak-to-advisor

or call 1800 136 089.

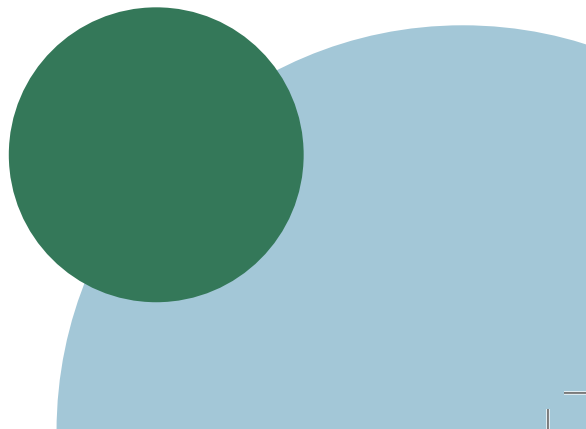
Know your rights



Your employer must, so far as is reasonably practicable, provide and maintain a workplace that is safe and without risk to your health. They must, so far as is reasonably practicable:

- Provide and maintain safe machinery and equipment.
- Ensure the safe use, handling, storage or transport of machinery, equipment, or substances.
- Keep your workplace in a safe condition, free of risks to health (for example, ensure fire exits are not blocked, and the worksite is generally tidy).

- Provide you suitable facilities for your welfare (such as, drinking water, toilets, hand washing facilities, and shelter).
- Give you the necessary information, instruction, training or supervision to enable you to do your work in a way that is safe and without risks to health. The information and training should be provided in a language you understand, or an interpreter should be available.





Key concepts:

- A hazard is something in the workplace that can cause harm to people.
- A risk is the chance (or likelihood) that a hazard will cause harm to people.
- An incident is a workplace event that results in or could have resulted in harm to people.
- Harm is death, injury, illness or disease that may be suffered by a person from a hazard or risk.



You are entitled to:



- Your employer consulting with you on issues which may affect your health and safety.
- Representation on occupational health and safety (OHS) issues in the workplace.
- Refuse work tasks that are dangerous and would pose a risk of harm or serious injury to yourself and others.

Your health and safety duties:

- Take reasonable care of your health and safety while at work.
- Take reasonable care for the health and safety of others who may be affected by your actions in the workplace.v
- Follow the instructions and training provided by your employer.
- Never interfere with or misuse any equipment that might put your or other people's health and safety or welfare at risk.
- Ask questions if you do not understand something.

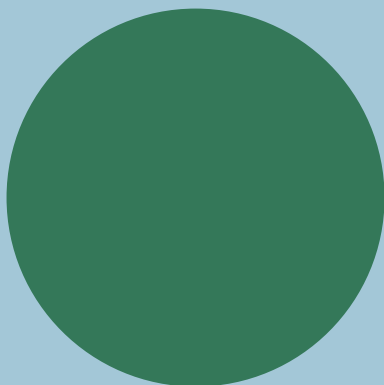


Report unsafe work and work-related injuries:

Report any risks, incidents, work-related injuries, poor treatment or concerns about safety to your employer and/or a health and safety representative (HSR) at your workplace.

If you have trouble reporting a problem or injury at work, or are still concerned after talking to your employer or HSR, you should call WorkSafe Victoria on 1800 136 089.

You can also report the issue to your union for help.





Workplace safety

Staying safe at work is as much about protecting your mind as it is your body. Bullying, discrimination, harassment and violence are all unacceptable behaviours at work. Whether these are actions of an employer or another worker, they can create risks to health and safety in the same way that a physical accident can.

Examples of unacceptable behaviour include:

- Bullying: repeated unreasonable behaviour including verbal abuse, unfair allocation of tasks or working hours, withholding necessary information, inappropriate monitoring and surveillance, isolating workers, setting tasks above a worker's skill level without access to training or support.
- Discrimination: being treated unfairly for a reason which may include race, age, gender, disability, physical features, or religious beliefs.
- Racism: discrimination or hostility towards a person or people based on their racial or ethnic group.

- Occupational violence and aggression: when a person is abused, threatened or assaulted at work. Abuse may come from an employer, supervisor, co-worker, customer, or member of the public.

- Gendered violence: violence directed at any person because of their sex, gender, or sexual orientation. Types of work-related gendered violence can include:



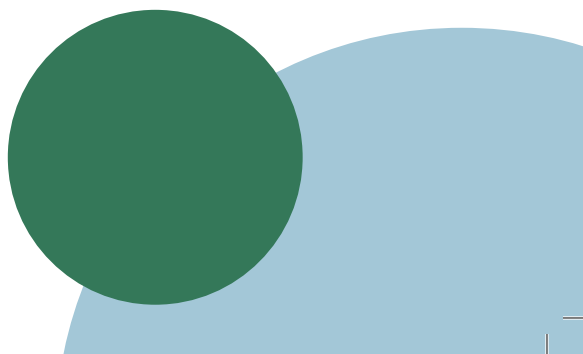
- Stalking or threats
- Verbal abuse
- Requests for sex
- Sexually explicit gestures or imagery
- Staring, touching
- Insults or offensive language
- Sexual harassment
- Sexual assault or rape





Farm safety

Working on a farm or vineyard comes with some common risks to health and safety that workers need to be aware of. Employers must provide all the necessary equipment and training required for each worker to do their job safely. Listed below are some of the most common aspects of horticulture work that need education, training and safety considerations.





Personal Protective Equipment:

Employers must provide all the necessary personal protective equipment (PPE) to ensure you can do your job safely. Some PPE you might use includes – helmets, brimmed hats, gloves, masks/ respirators, safety glasses, washable or disposable overalls or protective boots and clothes. Everyone needs to understand how to operate the equipment safely and when to use it.



Manual handling:

Lifting, pushing, pulling or carrying heavy things all day can cause serious injury. Your employer should:



- Provide appropriate mechanical aids and equipment (e.g. lifter trolley or powered pruners for pruning, picking, and harvesting) and ensure they are used correctly and maintained.
- Train you on how to safely use any mechanical equipment and aids, and on safe handling methods (e.g. work is done between shoulder and mid-thigh height with the elbows close to the body).



- Order supplies in smaller sizes (e.g. 20kg bags instead of 40kg bags). If using bigger sizes, use mechanical equipment only.
- Provide appropriate PPE (e.g. back harnesses).
- Allow you to take frequent rest breaks.
- Teach you stretching exercises to do before and after heavy work (e.g. Warm up cold muscles).



Picking bags:

Fruit picking often requires a bag with a shoulder strap. These bags can get very heavy and awkward as they fill up. There are several things your employer can do to reduce the risk of injury, like:



- Keeping bags to a safe, maximum size for the crop.
- Making sure the bag selected suits the worker's size and abilities.
- Providing wide and padded shoulder straps to spread the weight.
- Using hip straps to stop the bag from swinging away from the body.

Tubs and containers:

Some fruits like grapes and berries will often be carried in plastic tubs. Like picking bags, they should be the right size to keep the weight at a safe level. It is also important to work in a way that tubs can be picked up and put down comfortably, without the need for stretching your arms away from your body. Trailers should be used when available, and they should be as close to the picking area as possible.





Machinery and equipment

As part of your job, you may have to operate or be around a wide range of machinery and equipment. All of these machines require training and experience to make sure everyone stays safe at work. You need to be trained on each piece of equipment before you use them. Always check with your supervisor before using specific tools or equipment, and make sure you have the right training and information before you do. Do not forget, employers must:

- Ensure workers have been properly trained to operate any equipment before using it and provide proper supervision when needed.
- Provide workers with any PPE needed and explain how to use it correctly.



Tractors

On a farm, tractors are one of the leading causes of severe injury and death. Most injuries and deaths are due to:

- Tractor roll-overs.
- People riding on trailers and attachments.
- Falling objects.
- Getting on and off moving tractors.
- Not wearing a seatbelt.
- Entangled clothing, hair or jewellery.
- Driving on soft or uneven ground resulting in vehicle tipping over.



Each tractor must be fitted with Roll-over protective structures (ROPS). ROPS provide a protective zone around tractor drivers so that in the event of an overturn, they are protected from the tractor rolling over and landing on them.

You must always be well-trained and know how to safely operate the tractor and its attachments. You should never have other people riding on a tractor or its attachments, and if driving on a public road, you must have a licence.

You should never ride on trailers or attachments of tractors. There have been multiple deaths and serious injuries. If you need to move from block to block you should drive a car, walk if it is a reasonable distance or if you do not have transport the workplace should provide you with a safe mode of transport such as a mini bus.





Agricultural bikes (Quad bikes)

Agricultural bikes are motorbikes with two, three or four wheels. Four-wheelers are also known as quad bikes. They are often used on farms because they are smaller than tractors. However, this also makes them unstable. They can roll over and cause severe injury or death if not used properly.

To reduce the risks with using a quad bike:

- Make sure you have received the proper training before you ride a quad bike.
- Quad bikes must be fitted with an appropriate operator protective device (OPD)
- Always wear a well-fitted and good quality helmet.
- Heavy-duty clothing and personal protective equipment should be worn such as sturdy boots, gloves, and protective eyewear.

- Never carry other people on trailers or single-person quad bikes.
- Check and adjust tyre pressure regularly.
- Check the brakes and controls before starting work.
- Only carry or tow loads that meet the safe operating instructions in the manufacturer's manual.

In many circumstances it is safer to use a ute or side-by-side vehicle, which are fitted with seatbelts.

Side-by-side vehicles

Side-by-side vehicles come with seatbelts, and doors or nets. However, there are still a number of risks to drivers. It is important that you always wear the seatbelt properly to help keep you within the vehicle's roll over protection zone and protect you from serious or fatal injuries.

Safety tips: ✓

- Never use the vehicle if untrained.
- Ensure the vehicle is fitted with Rollover protection structures (ROPS).
- Doors and door nets must be in place on the vehicle at all times.
- Don't use the vehicle if any of the safety features are not working.
- Many manufacturers recommend wearing helmets.



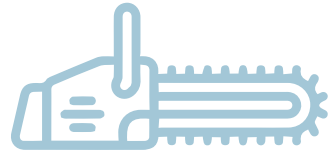
Forklifts



Forklifts are used to transport crates and to load vehicles. To drive a forklift, you must have the appropriate licence, and the weight of the load must always be within the forklift's load capacity. Forklifts should never be used to lift people unless fitted with a purpose-built work platform that meets Australian safety standards

Many forklift accidents happen in busy areas, so keep a safe distance from them in these situations. Where forklifts are used a lot such as in packing sheds, there should be pedestrian zones, and you should only walk in the pedestrian zones. If there are no pedestrian zones, ensure that you can be seen by the driver if walking near to a moving forklift.

A lot of back injuries also occur when a worker gets on or off a forklift. Forklifts need to have good footing, anti-slip surfaces and grab handles. It is important that you are given information and training on the correct ways to get on and off forklifts – maintain three points of contact at all times. You should never jump from a forklift.



Chainsaws

Chainsaws are very common on farms, and it is no surprise that they are dangerous. Typically, they are used for pruning and cutting trees and vines. The only way to use a chainsaw safely is through training and experience. Many serious chainsaw injuries happen every year because of a lack of training, poor maintenance, and no PPE. When using a chainsaw, you must always wear:

- ✓ • Safety glasses (and face shield)
- A hard hat
- Hearing protection
- Cut-resistant chaps
- Safety footwear
- Gloves

All workers helping the person with a chainsaw (for example, by removing pruned wood) also need to wear the same equipment and remain clear when cutting occurs.



Noise

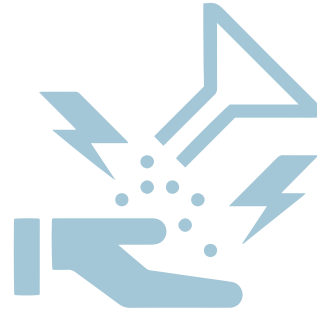
Your hearing is an often overlooked safety issue at work, but the noise from machinery can cause permanent hearing loss. The damage can occur gradually over several years and may remain unnoticed until it is too late. If noise at work cannot be stopped, your employer must provide personal hearing protection to increase your safety.



Hazardous substances and dangerous goods.



Hazardous substances.

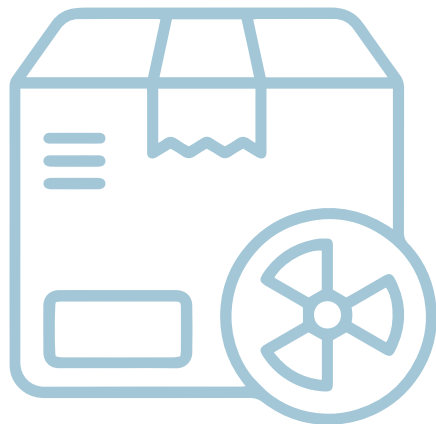


In the workplace, chemicals are classified according to whether they are hazardous to your health. On farms, chemicals like weed killers and insect killers can be immediately dangerous and cause eye damage, skin problems and long-term damage to your health. Chemical exposure may result in chronic illness and diseases, such as cancers, which have long latency periods (time between start of the illness and feeling its effects).

Your employer needs to make you aware of all the risks and dangers and provide comprehensive training on handling hazardous substances.

Dangerous goods.

Like chemicals, dangerous goods are classified according to their potential for immediate physical or chemical effects. These effects can include explosion, fire, corrosion and poisoning. Petrol, liquid petroleum gas (LPG), aerosols and some fertilisers are all dangerous goods. They must always be treated with care and according to correct procedures.



Handling chemicals safely.

Your employer must take steps to ensure that hazardous substances and dangerous goods do not put you or the public at risk. Your employer must:

- Keep a register of all hazardous substances and dangerous goods at the worksite.
- Have the current safety data sheets (SDSs) for them and make them available to workers.
- Train all workers in the safe use of chemicals and substances.
- Provide personal protective clothing and equipment to protect you from chemicals.
- Have well-ventilated areas for pouring and mixing chemicals.
- Provide first aid facilities wherever chemicals are used.
- Provide adequate facilities for washing like water, soap and towels.

Handling chemicals safely.

A Safety Data Sheet (SDS) is a document that provides health and safety information about products, substances or chemicals that are classified as hazardous substances or dangerous goods. They tell you:

- The product (its name, ingredients and properties)
- How the product can affect your health
- How to use and store it safely

If you cannot read and/or understand the SDS, tell your employer.

Biological hazards.

When working with potting mix, fertiliser and soil, there is a possibility of inhaling harmful dust, so an employer should always provide gloves and a disposable mask. Handling potting and seed-raising mixes may cause irritations or respiratory problems, especially if you have allergies or are particularly susceptible. You should always wash your hands after using potting mix, soil or compost.



Amenities

Clean drinking water, access to toilets, hand washing facilities and a clean place to eat are amenities that must be provided in your workplace.

Clean drinking water: Sometimes in remote workplaces a suitable drinking point may not be available. In these cases, employers need to provide drinking water by ensuring access to public drinking water facilities, bottled water or containers for employees to take water with them.

Toilets provided by employers need to be equipped with:

- ✓ • An adequate supply of toilet paper for each toilet.
- Hand washing facilities.
- Rubbish bins.
- Hygienic means for disposing of sanitary items used by female employees.

Where permanent toilets are not available, portable toilets may be provided. Portable toilets need to be installed securely to prevent them falling over or becoming unstable and need to be provided with a lockable door, lighting and ventilation. They must be cleaned regularly.

Farm workers must be provided with a clean place to eat. This may include a portable room with seating & food storage, or a sheltered outdoor seating area, or car fridge and insulated lunch box. Workers must have access to hand washing facilities.

Depending on the type of work you are doing and the location, showers and change rooms may also need to be provided by the employer, along with a secure place to store personal items (such as handbags, jewellery, personal identification documents, personal medication or hygiene supplies) while the employee is at work.

UV radiation, heat and cold.



On a farm, you will often have to work outside in both hot and cold weather. Both come with certain risks to your health. Working in hot conditions can easily result in you becoming dehydrated and suffering heat stress or illness. When it is wet and cold, there is a risk of hypothermia.

Protective clothing and footwear must be worn to protect you from extreme conditions, and your employer should reschedule your work if the conditions are too dangerous. It is also important that when you are working in hot weather, you are provided cool drinking water and you drink a cup of water every 15 to 20 minutes.

UV radiation from the sun can cause sunburn and sore, swollen eyes. Long-term risks include skin cancer, wrinkling, wasting skin tissues, excessive pigmentation, and clusters of tiny blood vessels and cataracts of the eye. Your employer should assess whether your job could cause heat stress or heat stroke and reduce that risk by:

- Checking the weather forecast like temperature, humidity and UV index and reschedule heavier work to a cooler day or cooler part of the day, for example starting earlier and finishing earlier.
- Provide personal protection like broad-brimmed hats, sunscreen and water and make sure you understand how to work safely in the sun.
- Give you a spot near the work area that is shaded so you can take your break out of the sun.
- Provide a genuine understanding of how difficult the work is and how often you will need to take breaks and rotate between workers.

Confined spaces.

A confined space is a small area that may make work more challenging and dangerous than an open space. Your employer is responsible for knowing where confined spaces are and informing all workers of the location and dangers.

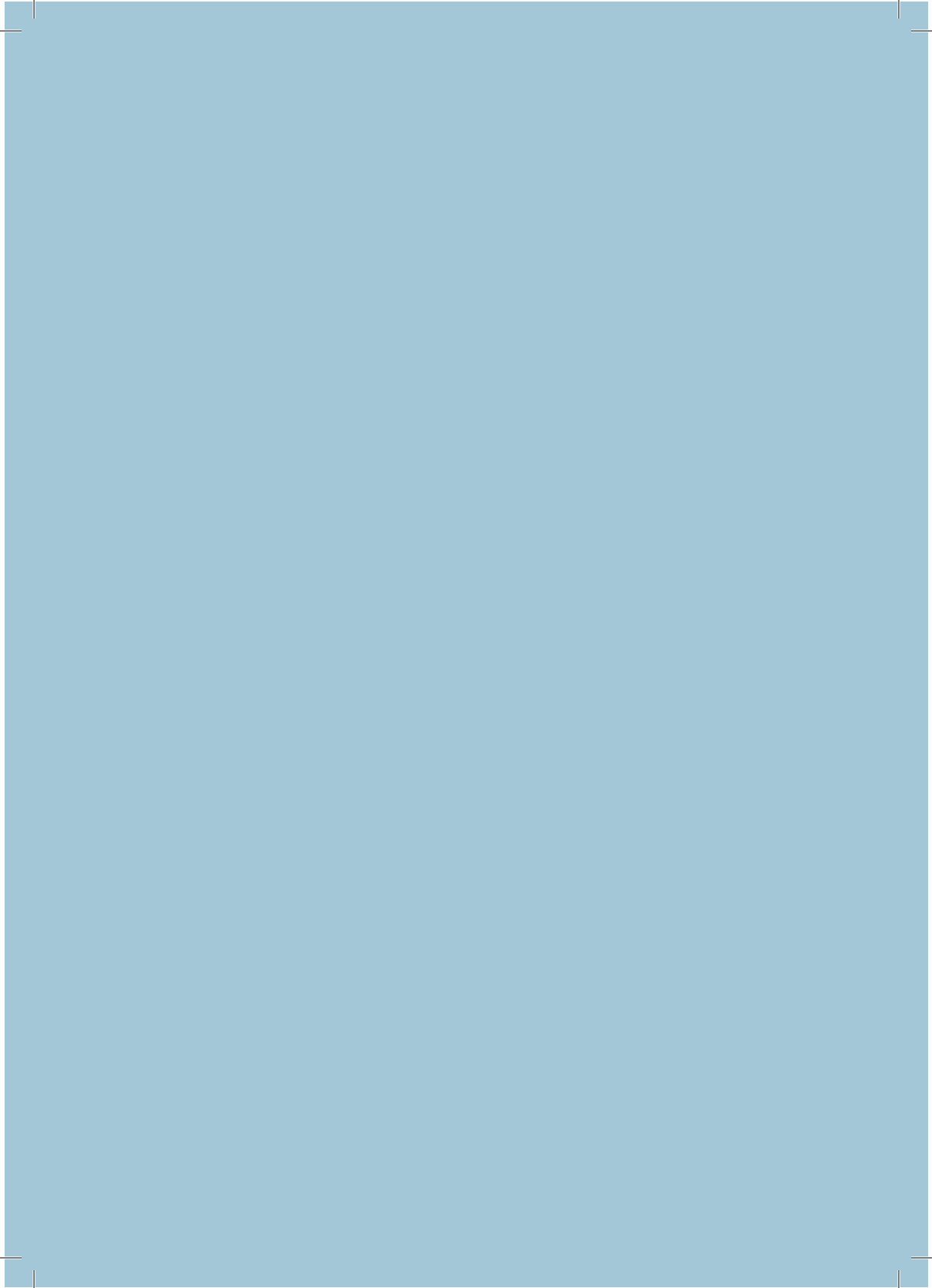
Confined spaces on a farm may include:

- A room, shed, or garage with little ventilation.
- Generator room.
- Enclosed garage used to run petrol or diesel engine.
- Silos.
- Vats.
- Underground tunnels and wells.
- Water tanks.

Confined spaces can be hazardous because of:

- Low oxygen levels.
- Harmful gases, fumes or vapours.
- Extreme heat or cold.
- Difficulty getting out of the space or providing access to perform first-aid.

You should not enter confined spaces without significant training from your employer, this includes understanding what to do if something goes wrong.



Steps for reporting unsafe practices at your workplace:

You must first report any risks, incidents, poor treatment or concerns about safety to your employer and/or a health and safety representative (HSR) at your workplace.

If you have any ongoing worries after speaking to them, contact WorkSafe Victoria on 1800 136 089.

You can also seek support and advice from your union.



How the Australian Workers' Union can help.

Even if you are new to a job, know that you have the right to speak up if you feel like you or others are being put at risk. Talk to your supervisor. They should be prepared to find ways of making every task a safe one. If you have concerns, you should contact WorkSafe on 1800 136 089. Your Union is also here to help.

We take a holistic approach so we can support workers directly, provide information, call out unethical practices, and shift the horticulture industry for the better.

Your local organiser.

The Australian Workers' Union has many well-respected local community members who are trained to help and support migrant farm workers. They can come and visit your farm or meet you locally to answer your questions, or you can give them a call. Remember, we are here for you and your best interests. Anything you talk to us about is private and confidential.

We also have local organisers who can help farm workers in Bendigo, Geelong, Gippsland, and Portland.

For expert advice and support, please call
1300 362 298 or email victoria@awu.net.au



Shenae Murray

Shenae is our Mildura organiser. Shenae has a young family and has lived in Mildura her whole life. Shenae can be contacted on 0400 687 082 or email:

shenae.murray@awu.net.au



James Newbold

James is our North East Victoria organiser. James can visit you in areas such as Shepparton, Ardmona, Cobram, Mansfield, Mooroopna, Nagambie, Rutherglen, and Wangaratta. You can reach James on 0439 010 063 or email:

james.newbold@awu.net.au



Join today for a fairer tomorrow.

Speak to a union representative on
1300 362 298 or email us at

victoria@awu.net.au



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