

TRACTOR SAFETY IN NEW SOUTH WALES—ROPS RETRO-FITMENT CAMPAIGN

A ROPS, or Roll Over Protection Structure, is a frame fitted to a tractor to protect the operator in the event of the tractor rolling over or flipping backwards. In May 2000, WorkCover NSW announced a \$2.4 million ROPS Rebate Scheme, giving farmers access to a \$200 rebate for the fitting of an approved ROPS to their tractors. The ROPS must comply with the Australian Standard AS 1636 'Tractor Roll-Over Protective Structures—Criteria for Tests for AS Earth-Moving Protective Structures'.¹

Tractors do not merely pull equipment; they provide the power to operate often quite complex machines—for example: cultivating equipment, hay balers, fertiliser spreaders, machines that drill seeds into the ground, slashers, and milling equipment, among others. Tractors on Australian farms are the single most common agent involved in serious injury and deaths. The three mechanisms commonly involved in tractor-related injuries are rollovers, run overs, and becoming entangled in the Power Take Off (PTO), which is the long shaft—rotating at high speed—that transfers power from the tractor to operate the attached machinery. Of these three mechanisms, tractor rollovers are the most common,² and are preventable by having a ROPS fitted and through the wearing of a seatbelt.

Over the past decade, WorkCover NSW has investigated 45 fatalities on farms in NSW, of which 15 were directly attributed to tractor rollover. On average each year, 30 claims are made for permanent disability and 100 claims are made for temporary disability from tractor related incidents.¹

Legislation for the provision of ROPS on tractors has been in place in NSW since 1982, which requires all tractors weighing between 560 kg and 15,000 kg to be fitted with ROPS.¹ Davidson (1996) found that 26 per cent of tractors in use on farms in NSW did not have a ROPS.³ He estimated that at that time there were 88,000 tractors in use on NSW farms and extrapolated that there were 24,000 tractors without ROPS.

Following the National Tractor Safety Project,³ the Victorian WorkCover Authority implemented a *ROPS Retro-fitting Campaign* that fitted 12,129 ROPS.⁴ WorkCover NSW has initiated a similar program. Under the *ROPS Retro-fitting Campaign* in NSW there are funds to provide a subsidy for 10,000 ROPS. The scheme will finish at the end of 2002 and as of the 31 March 2002 there have been 5239 ROPS fitted.

Anyone interested in further information regarding the *ROPS Retro-fitting Campaign* should contact Kerri-Lynn Stark on 02 6752 8210.

REFERENCES

1. WorkCover New South Wales. *Fit Roll Over Protection. Get a \$200 rebate. Pamphlet.* Sydney: WorkCover New South Wales, 2000.
2. Franklin R, Mitchell R, Driscoll T, Fragar L. *Farm Related Fatalities in Australia, 1989–1992.* Moree, NSW: Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety, National Occupational Health and Safety Commission, and the Rural Industries Research Development Corporation, 2000.
3. Davidson A. *National Tractor Safety Project Final Report.* Moree, NSW: Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety, 1996.
4. Day L, Rechnitzer G. *Evaluation of the tractor rollover protective structure rebate scheme 1997–98.* Clayton, Victoria: Monash University Accident Research Centre, 1999. ☒