

SA200801 – 23/10/2008

## Working with modified vehicles – ‘bull catchers’

### Purpose

To remind owners, employers and workers of the hazards associated with vehicles that have been modified for various purposes on properties.

Many cattle properties throughout the Top End use converted four-wheel-drives known as bull catchers for mustering cattle.

Vehicles that are modified for this purpose are required to meet the requirements of the *Workplace Health and Safety Act 2007*.

There is a major concern over the number of deaths and serious injury associated with the use of modified vehicles in primary industry, as well as in the context of use for leisure. In the Northern Territory there have been 3 deaths directly associated with the operation of vehicles known as bull catchers in the past 5 years, 2 of which have occurred in the last 6 months.

In these cases, death has been caused by blunt force with the body part crushed between the bull catcher and the ground or other surface, or contact of the body with a rock or tree or other surface, having been flung from the bull catcher by momentum.

Occupational Health and Safety risk associated with bull catcher operation on Australian properties should therefore be assessed as HIGH, and employers and those in control of the workplace are required by law to take active steps to control that risk.

### Recommendations

Identify all hazards from work, which may affect the health and safety of a worker, and any other person who could be affected by the work.

Conduct a risk assessment. The following are the principles for reducing injury risk in any workplace. They are also what the *Workplace Health and Safety Act* and Workplace Health and Safety Regulations require.

#### 1. Elimination of the hazard

Where possible, an injury risk must be eliminated, or removed from the workplace. This is obviously the most effective way to reduce risk. While it is often not possible to eliminate a particular hazard, the law requires that, as an employer, you must at least think about elimination as the first option.

#### 2. Substitution for a hazard of lesser risk

Where it is not possible to remove a hazard altogether, you need to consider whether the hazard can be ‘substituted’ for something that will do the same job, but is less risky. Substitution of a modified vehicle by other small more stable vehicles or machines is a key option that all farmers should consider.

#### 3. Other engineering measures to prevent injury

Improving the design of machinery and/or isolating the worker from the hazard is the basis of many safety improvements in the workplace. For any vehicle that can roll over and crush



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the occupants or can result in the occupant being ejected from the seat, an operator protective system, generally a Roll - over Protective Structure (ROPS) known as 'Roll Cages' in the industry, with occupant restraint, is necessary – ensure modified vehicles are fitted with ROPS and seatbelts.

#### 4. Safety rules

Whatever machine or vehicle is to be used, you must make sure that it is operated safely. Your farm rules should include:

- Giving effective safety induction and training to workers who use the vehicle.
- Providing workers with information about the risks and how these risks can be reduced.
- Supervising workers using vehicles, including bull catchers.

#### 5. Personal protective equipment - helmets

Personal protective equipment must be provided and used where workers cannot be protected from a hazard by other control measures. This includes providing helmets to protect from head injury and safety goggles/glasses to protect from eye injury for operators and passengers of bull catchers.

The more effective controls must always be considered first. In practice, best practice in OHS risk management will require a mix of the above measures, however consider that recommendation 1 is the highest form of control and recommendation 5 the lowest.

### Emergency communication

As bull catchers are often operated at some distance from the farm base, it is very important that you have an effective communication system between the operator and base, and that the location of where workers are going and the expected time to return is known. EPIRBs (Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacons) are in use in some larger enterprises. These signal an emergency and locate the position of a person in distress for emergency services.

### Legislative requirements

[Workplace Health and Safety Act:](#)

Section 55  
Employer's general statutory duty of care

[Workplace Health and Safety Regulations:](#)

**38 Hazard identification and risk assessment**

**39 Risk management**

### Further information

Additional information on this issue or other safety matters is available at NT WorkSafe:

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