

Safety at picking time

By Greg Kauter, NSW Policy Manager, Cotton Australia

As the picking season approaches, Cotton Australia would like to remind all growers about hazards encountered during harvesting.

It is advisable to hold a meeting with the entire picking team before commencing the harvest to make them aware of potential hazards so as to ensure a safe working environment for everyone involved.

The following guidelines are designed to alert growers and operators to the possible dangers associated with picking, and how to prevent accidents.

Clothing and personal protective equipment

Wearing appropriate clothing and using protective equipment where necessary can reduce the risk of an accident occurring:

- Wear close fitting shirts, trousers or shorts. Loose fitting clothing can be caught in machinery.
- Wear sturdy, fully enclosed shoes with a good grip on the sole.
- Wear a wide brimmed hat to prevent sunburn.

- Tie up long hair and remove any jewellery that could be caught in machinery.
- Personal protective equipment such as eye goggles, dust masks and earmuffs should be worn when needed, e.g. when cleaning pickers.

Working around powerlines

Working around powerlines is one of the most common and dangerous hazards encountered during picking. To avoid possible electrocution, make sure you follow a few simple practices when picking:

- Before you start picking, consult a farm map and note the location of all powerlines and their proximity to where you will be working.
- Provide workers with accurate, up to date diagrams depicting the location of powerlines on the property, and also indicating safe traffic paths to eliminate the possibility of powerline contact.
- Complete a risk assessment to identify and implement appropriate control measures to prevent any hazards which may have the potential to harm the

health or safety of a person. This should be completed for each paddock and piece of machinery to be used.

- Check all machinery cords and connections to make sure they are safe.
- Install visual markers in areas where electrical hazards are identified before commencing work.
- Before operating machinery, look up and check for lines, and always lower the machine to a minimum height before relocating.
- Ensure any machinery operators are aware of the height and reach of their machines in both stowed and working positions to ensure minimum approach distance to powerlines is maintained.
- Carefully monitor weather conditions as powerlines can sway in wind, sag in the heat, and can be difficult to see at dawn and dusk.
- Assign a competent safety observer to each work team to guide machinery movements near overheard powerlines, warn the operator of unsafe conditions and ensure that minimum safety approach distances are maintained.
- If machinery does come into contact with a powerline, try to break the contact with the line in the safest way possible. Never attempt to get out of the machine unless you are in danger, and if you do exit the machine, jump well clear and shuffle away. Make sure you keep a good distance away from the machine if it is still in contact with a powerline.

Operating machinery

All farm machinery can be dangerous, so operators must ensure that they are safety conscious at all times.

- Always follow the directions outlined in the manual – never operate using defective equipment, don't interfere with safety devices, only operate while sitting in the driver's seat, and keep windows and mirrors clean.
- Mount and dismount properly using the ladders, and maintain the ladders regularly to ensure stability. It is also important to always lower equipment before dismounting.
- Keep clear of exposed moving parts.

To reduce the risk of injury, perform regular maintenance checks and procedures on farm machinery to keep it in a good working condition.



Cotton pickers have the potential to cause serious injuries.

Operating cotton pickers

Cotton pickers have the potential to inflict serious injuries, so make sure you take precautions to minimise any risk.

- When setting up the picker, communication between the driver and mechanic on the ground is vital, and they must be able to see each other at all times.
- When greasing the bars, use a remote control or have a second operator in the cabin.
- Ensure that spindles and heads are disengaged when cleaning.
- If you need to work under the picker head at any time, make sure that it is locked into place, and never allow people in the cabin when you are underneath the picker.

Working around module builders

Module builders are another potentially hazardous piece of machinery, especially considering a picker buggy can tip up to two tonnes of cotton into the builder in one go.

- The tipper operator should only begin to tip on the signal of the module operator who should have a clear view of the inside of the module.
- The ground crew needs to be aware

of the dangers when a picker basket is being emptied into the module builder. Make sure they avoid the motor, hoses and module base when it is being lifted. Ensure no one is standing in front of the module door when it is opened.

- Never rest or sleep inside a module builder.

Preventing fires

During harvest time, hot, dry weather conditions combined with overheated machinery can cause a fire. By following these tips, the risk of a fire breaking out can be greatly reduced.

- It is imperative that a no smoking policy is set out and enforced.
- Cotton fibre becomes highly flammable when it is compacted in the picker basket or module builder. Regularly clean out head chokes as trapped cotton can heat up and ignite built up cotton.
- If a fire starts in a module, everyone should move away and upwind of the smoke. Never enter a module builder to extinguish a fire in case there is a hidden fire cavity below the surface.
- Before commencing picking, ensure that all fire extinguishers and water tanks are full, that hoses and fittings are in good order.

Night work

During picking it is often necessary to work through the night. Operators must take extra care to be aware the workers' positions on the ground as visibility is limited at night.

Wearing reflective safety vests and activating audible warning sounds on machinery also reduces the risk of an accident occurring.

Travelling on private and public roads with large machinery

- Before moving machinery around a farm, consult the farm map to identify the best route to take.
- Travel at a safe speed and ensure flashing lights and appropriate signage are displayed.
- When travelling on public roads, make sure you are aware of the legal requirements needed for driving large machinery, and check whether you require an over-dimension vehicle permit.
- Drivers must also have the appropriate licence to drive large vehicles.

For further information on implementing safe practices while picking, contact one of Cotton Australia's Grower Services Managers in either New South Wales (02) 6792 6041 or Queensland (07) 4639 4908.



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