



# Safe sheep shearing

Back injuries, sprains, strains and hand wounds are the leading injuries associated with shearing sheep<sup>1</sup>. These can be avoided by using the correct techniques when manually handling sheep and regularly checking and maintaining shearing equipment.

## KEY POINTS

- > Use correct technique when manually handling sheep.
- > Check shearing and crutching equipment regularly.
- > Never use an unsecured grinder.
- > Always wash and dry hands after contact with sheep to avoid diseases humans can catch from animals.

*To assess the major risks and how to control them, see page 2.*

Many shearing injuries are a result of poor technique when handling sheep or using badly maintained equipment. People inexperienced in handling sheep should be trained and supervised to maintain animal welfare and production standards, and to avoid being harmed.

**Accepted Good Practice:** Shearers need to be aware of the risks when manually handling and shearing sheep and ensure they follow good practice guidelines. WorkSafe has worked with the shearing industry to produce the good practice table on page 2.

The purpose of this information sheet is to help reduce the risk of injuries by providing practical guidance on how to manage various sheep-shearing risks. Contractors who shear or crutch thousands of sheep each year are at high risk of injury but generally have the technique, fitness and equipment care practices to manage the risks. Farmers who shear and crutch as a seasonal task, rather than full-time, are at risk through less-practiced technique, poorly-maintained gear or not physically being prepared for the task.

**The Law:** The Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 (HSWA) is New Zealand's work health and safety law. The act requires that a person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) must ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the health and safety of workers.

The duties of a PCBU apply to all work activities and places work is carried out on a farm.

<sup>1</sup> Sourced from ACC claims database 2008-2014.

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## HEALTH AND SAFETY LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

The primary duties of a PCBU include:

- > providing and maintaining a safe work environment, safe plant and structures and safe systems of work
- > providing any information, training, instruction or supervision that is necessary to protect everyone from the health and safety risks at work.

Workers must:

- > take reasonable care for their own health and safety and that their actions or inactions do not harm the health and safety of others
- > co-operate with any reasonable health and safety policy or procedure of the PCBU notified to them and comply with any reasonable instruction given by the PCBU (eg using personal protective equipment).

TABLE OF RISKS	
Risk	Good Practice
<b>MANUALLY HANDLING SHEEP</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Always warm up with appropriate exercises (eg walking briskly to raise the body's temperature) before manually handling sheep to reduce the risk of back strains and injury.</li> <li>&gt; Avoid lifting sheep, if possible. Use gates and ramps where available. If you have to lift a sheep, use your legs, not your back.</li> <li>&gt; Use the correct techniques when catching and dragging sheep:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- turn the sheep's head onto its shoulder</li> <li>- hold the sheep against braced knees with one hand under the chin and one on the rump</li> <li>- turn the sheep's head to the rear while the other hand forces the hindquarters down</li> <li>- when the sheep is no longer standing on its feet, lift the front leg while walking backwards and sit the sheep on its rump.</li> </ul> </li> <li>&gt; Avoid twisting or turning more than 90° when dragging/walking a sheep backwards.</li> <li>&gt; Take every chance to straighten and extend your back beyond straight.</li> </ul>
<b>SHEARING AND CRUTCHING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Use correct techniques when shearing or crutching.</li> <li>&gt; Keep the shearing handpiece in the best possible condition and replace worn parts.</li> <li>&gt; Undertake regular safety checks of shearing equipment.</li> <li>&gt; If you carry blades for crutching or shearing the occasional sheep out in the paddock, have a protective cap over the blades to reduce the risk of accidental cutting or stabbing injuries.</li> <li>&gt; Crutch sheep standing in a race to lessen back strain and increase output.</li> </ul>
<b>GRINDERS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Always use clear safety glasses and ear protection when using the grinder.</li> <li>&gt; Make sure the grinder is well lit and securely anchored in place.</li> <li>&gt; Make sure the grinder has well-preserved guards to reduce the risk of any objects flying up and hitting the operator.</li> <li>&gt; Only let people who are trained or supervised operate the grinder.</li> </ul>
<b>DISEASES HUMANS CAN CATCH FROM ANIMALS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Wash and dry your hands thoroughly after contact with sheep.</li> <li>&gt; Maintain vaccination and parasite control programmes, where necessary.</li> <li>&gt; Isolate any sheep showing signs of illness from people and other animals.</li> <li>&gt; Make sure that a veterinarian performs vaccinations that are dangerous to humans.</li> </ul>

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