

ACOP: Safe farm vehicle operation

INDUSTRY SUPPORT PACK

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New Zealand Government
Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa

WORKSAFE
Mahi Haumarū Aotearoa



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Pack purpose

This pack supports people and businesses involved in agricultural work, including farmers, farm workers, contractors, and suppliers and installers, to understand how to apply the approved code of practice (ACOP) for *Safe farm vehicle operation* to their everyday work.

How to use this pack

Agriculture businesses and organisations can use information from this pack in member updates, workforce communications, training sessions, inductions, toolbox talks and conversations between farmers, farm managers, contractors and suppliers.

It will provide you with:

- purpose of the ACOP
- an overview of the contents
- what's in scope
- what's out of scope
- target audience
- key messages
- FAQs
- what guidance is available to support the ACOPs
- details on how to understand the online resources webpage that accompanies the ACOP.

Important links and resources

ITEM	LINK
Published ACOP	Safe farm vehicle operation
Resources webpage	More information and resources – Approved code of practice for safe farm vehicle operation
Background on ACOP development	Two new draft ACOPs in agriculture

Purpose of the ACOP

This ACOP sets out WorkSafe New Zealand's expectations about one way PCBU's can comply with selected legal duties under the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 (HSWA) and the Health and Safety at Work (General Risk and Workplace Management) Regulations 2016 when farm vehicles and attached machinery are used for agricultural work.

It focuses on practical actions to manage the risk of death or serious injury from loss of control, rollover, collision, people being struck, crushing and entanglement. It also covers topics such as maintenance, remote work, emergency response, first aid, young workers and impairment.

While following an ACOP is not mandatory, it sets a recognised standard for HSWA compliance. Businesses can meet their obligations in another way, provided it achieves an equivalent standard of health and safety.

Who this ACOP is for

The ACOP is for PCBUs involved in agricultural work where farm vehicles or attached machinery are used, including:

- farmers, growers, farm owners, farm managers and farm operators
- agricultural contractors and subcontractors
- PCBUs that operate, manage or control farm vehicles or attached machinery
- PCBUs that provide work vehicles, attached machinery, training, supervision, emergency arrangements or first aid arrangements
- people responsible for planning, supervising or carrying out farm vehicle and attached machinery work
- PCBUs responsible for young workers, children or other people who may be affected by farm vehicle movements.

Content structure

The ACOP is structured around practical ways to manage the risks associated with farm vehicles and attached machinery. It explains how risks change depending on the operating environment, the vehicle type, the task and the worker's capability.

- **Part A** introduces the ACOP, explains who it is for, what it covers, how it should be used and where to find supporting information.
- **Part B** covers the operating environment, including ground and access, weather and visibility, people and animals, children, other farm activity, and working near public roads or areas used by the public.
- **Part C** covers safely operating farm vehicles and attached machinery, including changing conditions, choosing the right vehicle, pre-start checks, manufacturer limits, protective equipment, core safe-use actions, vehicle-specific risks, higher-risk tasks, maintenance and taking vehicles out of service.
- **Part D** covers general requirements that support safe systems of work, including information, supervision, training and instruction, remote or isolated work, emergency plans, first aid, young workers, and drugs and alcohol.
- **The appendix** provides glossary definitions for key terms such as ATV, ballast, crush protection device, impairment, machinery, operator, plant, PTO, quad bike, ROPS, side-by-side, tractor, vehicle, worker and workplace.

Quick guide to the ACOP

IF YOU NEED TO UNDERSTAND	GO TO	LOOK FOR
Who the ACOP is for and what it covers	Part A, sections 1.1–1.5	Audience, vehicles and machinery covered, duties covered, how to use the ACOP and supporting information.
Critical risk context	Part A, section 1.2	Why farm vehicle operation is likely to be a critical risk.
Choosing the right vehicle	Part C, section 5.2	Vehicle suitability, stability, control measures and task selection.
Operating environment checks	Part B, sections 3.1–3.7	Ground and access, weather and visibility, work-related factors, people and animals, children, public road interfaces and what to do if conditions change.
What to do when conditions change	Part B, section 3.3 and Part C, section 5.1	Pause, reassess, change the task, delay or stop work.
Pre-start checks and manufacturer limits	Part C, sections 6.1–6.4 and Table 3	Operator capability, vehicle condition, operating area, loads, attachments, tyres, steering, brakes, and manufacturer limits.
Protective equipment	Part C, section 6.5	Seatbelts, approved helmets, fit, condition, safety standards, replacement after damage or impact, and PPE limitations.

IF YOU NEED TO UNDERSTAND	GO TO	LOOK FOR
Core safe operating actions	Part C, section 7.1	Stay within limits, secure loads, remove keys, do not leave vehicles running unattended, and stop when conditions become unsafe.
Vehicle-specific control measures	Part C, sections 8.2–8.6	Quad bikes, side-by-sides, two-wheel motorbikes, utes and four-wheel drives, tractors, CPDs, ROPS, PTO guards, passenger rules and age limits.
Higher-risk tasks	Part C, sections 9.1–9.6 and Table 4	Towing, attachments, spraying, spreading, working near water, working under raised loads, breakdowns, rollovers and recovery.
Maintenance and taking vehicles out of service	Part C, sections 10.1–10.2 and Table 5	Servicing, repairs, modifications, supports, isolation, unsafe vehicles and CPEng certification where manufacturer approval is not available.
Training, remote work, emergency plans and first aid	Part D, sections 12.0–15.0 and Tables 6–9	Capability, supervision, training records, communication, escalation, emergency plan content and first aid arrangements for vehicle and machinery incidents.
Young workers and vehicles	Part D, sections 16.0 Table 10	Age-based restrictions and supervision requirements.
Drugs and alcohol	Part D, section 17.0	Managing impairment risks, preventing impaired vehicle and attached machinery operation, drugs and alcohol policies, medication effects, and worker responsibilities.
Plain-language definitions	Appendix 1	Definitions for ATV, CPD, impairment, machinery, operator, fatigue, PTO, ROPS, side-by-side, tractor, worker and workplace.

What's in scope

The ACOP applies to PCBUs that are farmers, farm owners, operators and managers, and agricultural contractors and subcontractors. It applies across all types of farms, including livestock farming, dairy farming, arable farming, horticulture and mixed farming operations.

It covers the safe use of the following farm vehicles and attached machinery for agricultural work:

- quad bikes
- side-by-side vehicles
- two-wheel motorbikes
- tractors
- utes and other 2WD and 4WD vehicles
- machinery attached to vehicles, such as trailers, mowers and spray units, where the attachment can affect stability or safety.

It also covers selected legal duties and actions relating to:

- primary duty of care and management or control of plant
- information, supervision, training and instruction
- first aid and emergency planning for farm vehicle and attached machinery incidents
- remote or isolated farm vehicle and machinery work
- young workers and age-based restrictions for vehicles and machinery
- managing impairment from alcohol, drugs, medication, fatigue, stress, health conditions or other temporary conditions affecting behaviour.

What's out of scope

The ACOP does not cover every vehicle, machine, risk, activity or legal duty that may arise on a farm. It applies only to the specific risks, circumstances and actions described in each section.

- It is not a complete farm health and safety management system.
- It does not replace the need to consider the actual work, workplace, people, vehicle, machinery, terrain, weather, visibility, load, attachments and operating conditions.
- It does not set out actions for every hazardous substance or chemical exposure risk associated with spraying or spreading.
- It does not replace road rules or traffic management requirements that may apply when working on or near public roads.
- It does not cover every whole-of-farm emergency or first aid arrangement, although vehicle and attached machinery incidents can be included in whole-of-farm systems if those systems cover the relevant risks.
- The supporting resources page is additional information only. It is not part of the ACOP and does not form part of the actions needed to be treated as complying with the stated HSWA duties.

Key messages

Overarching message

- This ACOP helps farmers, farm managers, contractors and other PCBU's understand what good health and safety practices can look like when farm vehicles and attached machinery are used for work.
- This ACOP provides practical, sector-specific information to help businesses understand and manage the critical risks most likely to cause death, serious injury or serious illness related to farm vehicles and attached machinery.
- It explains practical actions for checking the operating environment, choosing suitable vehicles, keeping operators and others safe, managing higher-risk tasks, training workers, planning for emergencies, and stopping work when conditions cannot be managed safely.
- The ACOP will come into effect on **1 April 2027**, in alignment with commencement of the Health and Safety at Work Amendment Act 2026 (the Amendment Act).
- You can start familiarising yourself with the ACOP now, ahead of its commencement on 1 April 2027. The ACOP provides a useful tool for understanding health and safety expectations, improving health and safety practice, and supporting better outcomes across New Zealand's agriculture sector.
- One of the changes to HSWA introduced by the Amendment Act is a provision known commonly as 'safe harbour'.
- The intention of safe harbour is to give duty holders more certainty. This means that if a duty holder follows all relevant actions in the ACOP that apply to a specific risk, they will be treated as compliant with the law.
- As this ACOP was approved before the Amendment Act's commencement date, it does not have safe harbour status. It will need to be reapproved after 1 April 2027, once the legislative changes take effect. If the ACOP is reapproved, it will then have safe harbour status as described above.
- While following an ACOP is not mandatory, it provides one recognised way to show compliance with the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 (HSWA). Businesses can meet their duties in other ways if it is at least equal to the standard described in the ACOP.

- WorkSafe will work with the sector to support understanding and implementation of this ACOP ahead of the 1 April 2027 commencement date.

ACOP-specific messaging

FARM VEHICLE OPERATION IS LIKELY TO BE A CRITICAL RISK

The ACOP recognises that using farm vehicles and attached machinery for work is likely to be a critical risk because of the potential for death, serious injury and notifiable events.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT VEHICLE IS A KEY CONTROL MEASURE

The safest decision may be to:

- change the task
- use a different vehicle
- delay work
- stop work altogether where conditions mean risks cannot be managed safely.

CONDITIONS MUST BE CONTINUALLY REASSESSED

The ACOP places strong emphasis on:

- changing ground conditions
- weather and visibility
- fatigue
- changing work demands
- people and children entering the work area.

ADDITIONAL ACOP MESSAGING

- Choose the right vehicle for today's job, terrain, load, conditions and operator capability.
- Farm vehicle work is likely to be a critical risk because incidents can result in death or serious injury.
- Before work starts, check the operating environment, including ground, access, weather, visibility, people, animals, children, fatigue, dehydration and public road interfaces.
- If conditions change, pause the task, reassess whether the vehicle can be controlled and remain stable, then change how the work is done, delay it, or stop it.
- Do not allow vehicles to be used if they are not in safe operating condition, the operator is not capable, or the vehicle is not designed for the load, passengers, attachments, task or conditions.
- Use vehicles and attached machinery within manufacturer limits, including load, towing, passenger numbers, tyres, terrain, slope suitability and required safety features.
- Seatbelts should be worn whenever fitted. Approved protective helmets are required for quad bikes, side-by-sides and two-wheel motorbikes.
- Children must be kept well clear of vehicle movements. Vehicles should not be started, moved or reversed until children are visible and away from the vehicle's path of travel.
- Vehicle-specific control measures matter. Quad bikes, side-by-sides, two-wheel motorbikes, utes, four-wheel drives and tractors each have different risks and different controls.
- Higher-risk tasks such as towing, using attachments, spraying, spreading, working near water, working under raised loads, breakdowns and rollovers need clear planning, communication and stop-work rules.

- Workers need information, supervision, training and instruction that matches the vehicle, task, terrain, conditions and risks.
- Remote or isolated work needs reliable communication, check-in and escalation arrangements, and a plan for delays in emergency assistance.
- Impaired workers must not operate farm vehicles or attached machinery. Policies only manage risk if they are actively applied and enforced.
- PPE is important, especially seatbelts and helmets, but it does not replace risk control measures such as speed, route selection, vehicle stability, load management and separation from people.
- A drugs and alcohol policy is only useful if it is understood, applied and enforced in practice.
- The resources webpage supports the ACOP but is separate from it. It provides additional information to help people understand and apply the ACOP.

USING THE ACOP IN PRACTICE

- Use the ACOP as a practical tool for inductions, seasonal refreshers, toolbox talks and contractor briefings.
- Start by checking the operating environment, then confirm the vehicle, operator and task are suitable.
- Keep monitoring conditions during work. Conditions can change quickly due to weather, terrain, fatigue, workload, stock movement and the presence of other people.
- Stop, reassess and change the task if the vehicle can no longer be operated safely and remain stable.
- Use the ACOP alongside existing farm procedures and health and safety systems.
- Use the ACOP to support practical conversations about vehicle choice, operator capability, children around vehicles, remote work and emergency planning.

KEY MESSAGES FOR INDUSTRY ORGANISATIONS

- Share the ACOP through newsletters, member updates, training sessions, webinars and rural networks.
- Encourage members to focus first on the practical actions most relevant to their vehicles, tasks and farm conditions.
- Promote the ACOP as a tool for managing critical risks that can lead to death or serious injury.
- Reinforce that choosing the right vehicle is a health and safety control measure, not simply an operational decision.
- Encourage businesses to use the ACOP during planning, training, contractor management and seasonal refresher activities.
- Focus on simple messages people can apply immediately: choose the right vehicle, check conditions, keep people clear and stop when risks cannot be managed safely.

FAQs

What is an ACOP?

An ACOP sets out standards for how duty holders can comply with the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 (HSWA) and its regulations. Although an ACOP isn't mandatory to follow, it sets out one way to comply with legal duties. Businesses can choose another way, as long as it achieves a standard of health and safety that is at least equal to what is described in the ACOP.

ACOPs differ from other types of WorkSafe guidance as follows.

- ACOPs are approved by the Minister for Workplace Relations and Safety.
- Developing ACOPs must include consultation with people affected.
- ACOPs have their own HSWA provisions that dictate their use in court proceedings.
- HSWA section 226 states that an ACOP may be used in civil and criminal proceedings as evidence of whether a duty holder has complied with HSWA and its regulation.

Is the ACOP mandatory?

No. Following an ACOP is not mandatory. It sets out one way to comply with legal duties. Businesses can choose another way, as long as it achieves a standard of health and safety that is at least equal to what is described in the ACOP.

Does this ACOP have safe harbour status?

This ACOP has been written as if the HSW Amendment Act 2026 changes to HSWA section 226 (Use of approved codes of practice in proceedings) applies. This amendment is known as safe harbour and does not come into effect until 1 April 2027. As this ACOP was approved before this date, it does not have safe harbour status.

What happens to this ACOP after 1 April 2027?

The safe harbour amendment to HSWA section 226 comes into effect on 1 April 2027. The ACOP will need to be reapproved by the Minister for Workplace Relations and Safety after 1 April 2027 for safe harbour to apply.

What does safe harbour mean?

Safe harbour means that if a duty holder, such as a PCBU, follows all relevant actions in an ACOP that apply to a specific risk, then the court may take this as evidence that the duty holder has met the relevant duty under HSWA.

How can industry use the ACOP?

Industry organisations, rural networks, training providers and larger farming businesses can use the ACOP to support practical conversations about farm vehicle risks. It can be used in:

- inductions
- seasonal refreshers
- toolbox talks
- contractor briefings
- training material
- newsletters
- member updates.

What is a critical risk?

The ACOP explains that farm vehicle operation is likely to involve critical risks because vehicle incidents can result in death, serious injury, notifiable incidents and occupational disease.

A critical risk is a risk associated with:

- a Schedule 1A HSWA hazard, or
- a hazard likely to result in:
 - death
 - a notifiable injury or illness
 - a notifiable incident
 - an occupational disease.

For farm work, examples may include:

- quad bike rollovers
- tractor rollovers
- vehicle collisions
- mobile plant incidents
- entanglement with PTOs
- workers being struck by vehicles.

Why does the ACOP focus on farm vehicle operation as a critical risk?

Farm vehicles and attached machinery are a leading cause of deaths and serious injuries in agriculture. The ACOP focuses on practical actions that reduce the likelihood of rollover, collision, loss of control, entanglement and run-over incidents.

The aim is to help PCBU's identify and manage risks before serious harm occurs.

What vehicles does the ACOP cover?

It covers quad bikes, side-by-sides, two-wheel motorbikes, tractors, utes and other 2WD and 4WD vehicles, and attached machinery such as trailers, mowers and spray units where these are used for agricultural work.

What are the main risks?

The main risks include death or serious injury from loss of control, rollover, collision, being struck, crushing, entanglement, unsafe vehicle or machinery condition, delayed emergency response and impairment.

What should happen before vehicle work starts?

The PCBU should check the operator, vehicle, task and conditions. They should only allow vehicle operation where the vehicle can be kept under control, stability can be maintained, visibility is adequate, and people can be kept clear of vehicle movements.

What should happen if conditions change?

Work should pause while the risks are reassessed. If the vehicle can still be controlled and remain stable, and people can be kept clear, work may continue with control measures in place. If not, the task should be changed, delayed or stopped.

Does the ACOP cover children on farms?

Yes. It recognises that children may be exposed to farm vehicle risks when they are working, living on the farm or visiting. Children should be separated from vehicle operating areas, visible to operators, and unable to enter vehicle movement areas.

Can young workers operate farm vehicles?

Age restrictions differ according to the vehicle, whether the young person is working, and the applicable regulations and manufacturer limits. Refer to section 16 and the relevant vehicle-specific section before allowing a young worker to drive or ride on a vehicle.

What protective equipment is expected?

Seatbelts should be worn whenever fitted. Approved protective helmets should be provided and worn for quad bikes, side-by-sides and two-wheel motorbikes. PPE does not replace the need to manage stability, speed, terrain, operator capability and environmental conditions.

What should industry encourage farmers and contractors to do first?

Encourage them to start with the basics:

- check the operating environment
- choose a vehicle that suits the task and conditions
- confirm the operator is capable
- keep people and children clear of vehicle movements, and
- stop or change the task if conditions make the work unsafe.

Guidance available to support the ACOP

The ACOP refers readers to an online resources page for supporting health and safety information. The resources page is additional information only. It is not part of the ACOP and does not form part of the actions duty holders need to take to be treated as complying with the stated HSWA duties.

[More information and resources – Approved code of practice for safe farm vehicle operation](#)

Supporting guidance is particularly relevant for topics that sit alongside the ACOP, such as:

- overlapping duties and PCBU roles
- worker rights and responsibilities
- PPE duties and practical PPE expectations
- contractor management and communication with subcontractors
- critical risks and farm-specific hazard information
- general WorkSafe agriculture guidance.

Communications material

We have provided some draft communications content that you may find useful to help promote this ACOP to your people and/or wider stakeholders.

Newsletter story

New ACOPs help clarify health and safety responsibilities on farms

Workplace Relations and Safety Minister Brooke van Velden has launched two new ACOPs that provide clarity about health and safety responsibilities on farms.

ACOPs outline practical steps people in specific sectors and industries can take to comply with their health and safety duties.

The two ACOPs, *Roles and responsibilities in agriculture* and *Safe farm vehicle operation*, align with amendments recently made to the Health and Safety at Work Act that will come into effect after 1 April 2027.

The ACOPs can be viewed on the [WorkSafe website](#)

Both ACOPs provide practical, sector-specific information to help farmers, growers, contractors, workers and other agriculture businesses understand and meet their existing duties under the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015.

While they don't come into effect until 1 April 2027, farmers, growers, contractors, workers and other businesses can start familiarising themselves with them now to understand what good health and safety practice on farms should look like and how they can support safer day-to-day work.

Following an ACOP is not mandatory, but an ACOP sets a recognised standard for health and safety compliance. Businesses can meet their duties in another way if it is at least equal to the standard set out in the ACOP.

ACOP FOR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN AGRICULTURE

The ACOP for *Roles and responsibilities in agriculture* focuses on practical situations where duties overlap between different businesses and people working on farms. It explains how to understand influence and control, consult with other businesses and coordinate activities before work starts and while work is underway.

The ACOP also includes actions for managing risks to children and young people on farms, worker duties, contractor responsibilities and supplier and installer interactions.

A key message is that agreeing who will carry out a task does not transfer a legal duty. Each business remains responsible for managing matters they can influence or control.

ACOP FOR SAFE FARM VEHICLE OPERATION

The ACOP for *Safe farm vehicle operation* sets out practical ways to manage serious vehicle-related risks, including choosing the right vehicle for the job, checking conditions, reassessing risks when things change, and keeping people clear of vehicle movements.

The ACOP can be used in inductions, seasonal refreshers, training, toolbox talks, contractor briefings and conversations about safer ways to carry out farm vehicle and attached machinery work. It can support practical conversations about safer vehicle choices, operator capability, children around vehicles, remote work, emergency planning and stop-work rules.

IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT

Over the coming months, WorkSafe will work with the sector to support understanding and implementation of these ACOPs ahead of the 1 April 2027 commencement date. If you have an event that you would like WorkSafe to attend to support understanding of ACOP content as well as safe harbour, please email engagementrequests@worksafe.govt.nz

FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information, the ACOPs can be viewed on the [WorkSafe website](#)

Social media posts

POST 1

Farm vehicle risks can change quickly with terrain, weather, fatigue, loads and people nearby.

WorkSafe's new *Safe farm vehicle operation* ACOP provides practical actions to help farmers and contractors choose the right vehicle, check conditions and stop or change the task when risks cannot be managed safely.

View the ACOP on the [WorkSafe website](#)

POST 2

Choose the right vehicle. Check the conditions. Keep people clear.

WorkSafe's new *Safe farm vehicle operation* ACOP helps farmers and contractors manage the risks most likely to cause serious injury or death on farms.

View the ACOP on the [WorkSafe website](#)

POST 3

Rollovers, collisions and loss of control continue to cause serious harm on farms.

WorkSafe's new *Safe farm vehicle operation* ACOP provides practical information for farmers, contractors and rural businesses on how to manage these risks and improve safety outcomes.

View the ACOP on the [WorkSafe website](#)

Toolbox talk prompt

Ask the team:

- Is this the right vehicle for today's job?
- Have conditions changed since work started?
- Can the vehicle remain stable and under control?
- Are children, workers, contractors and visitors clear of vehicle movements?
- What is our stop-work rule if conditions change?

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