

Managing psychosocial risks in the agriculture industry

What are psychosocial hazards?

Psychosocial hazards are specific sources of stress in a workplace that can lead to physical or psychological harm if exposure is intense or prolonged. Psychosocial hazards pose the risk of harm.



Psychological harm may include anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and sleep disorders, while physical harm may include musculoskeletal injuries, chronic disease and fatigue related injuries.



What are not psychosocial hazards?

Reasonable work demands and reasonable management action to address performance and conduct issues are **not** psychosocial hazards. Taking proactive steps to address performance and conduct matters in a fair and proportionate way is critical to protecting all workers from psychosocial risks.

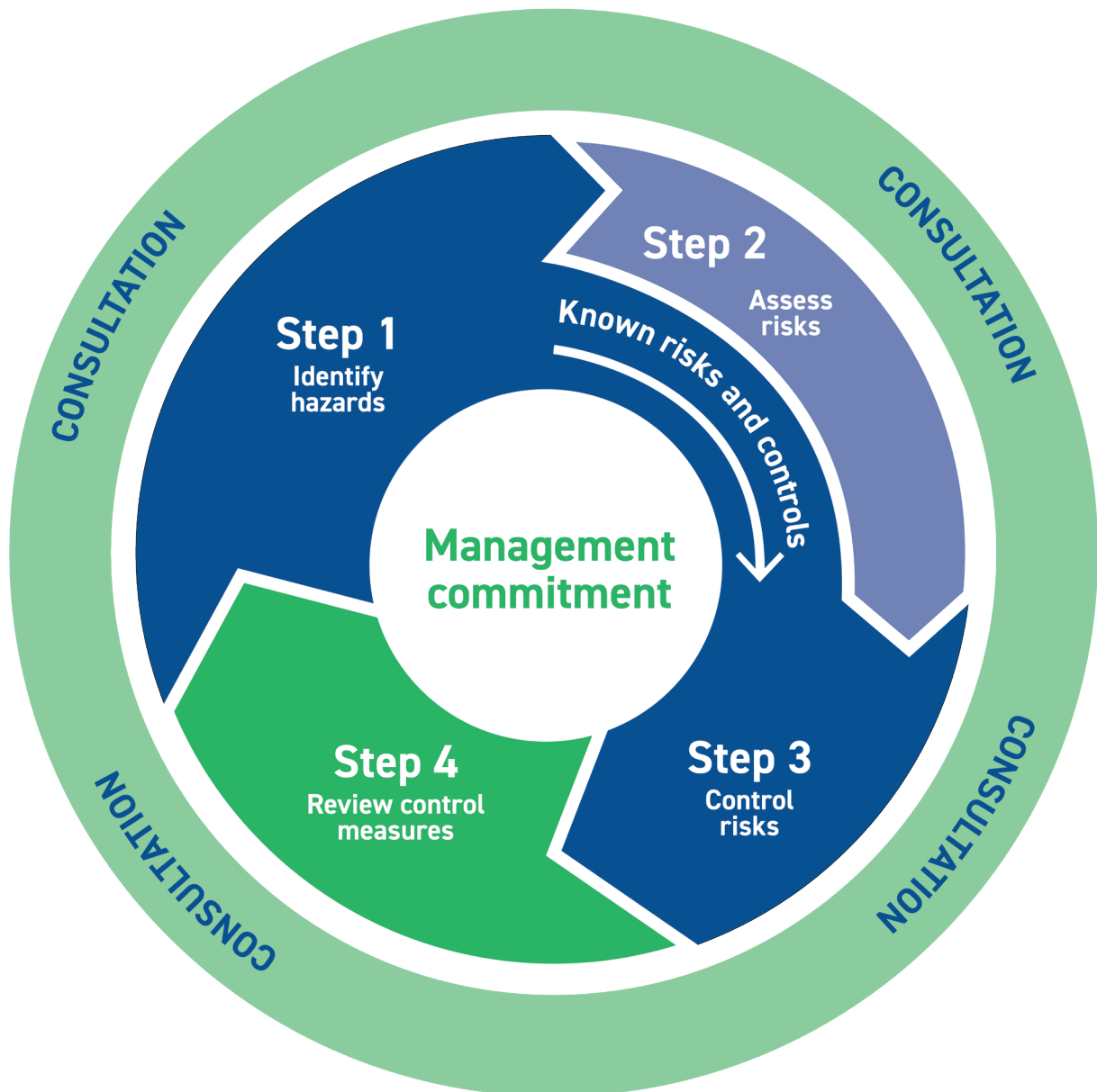
Here are some examples of what is reasonable and unreasonable.

 Reasonable	 Unreasonable
<ul style="list-style-type: none">» Disciplinary action for misconduct» Working longer hours during seeding and harvesting periods if fatigue and other health and safety risks are managed» A plan negotiated between a manager and a worker designed to improve work performance and/or workplace conduct» Giving constructive feedback to a worker about the quality of their work or productivity» Directing a worker to perform duties within their ability and job description	<ul style="list-style-type: none">» Setting performance expectations for a worker that are significantly beyond their ability or job description» Informing a worker that their performance and/or conduct doesn't meet expectations but not giving clear examples as to how» Not providing any support to a worker to help them improve their performance» Conducting a performance interview with a worker to deliver negative feedback and not offering the worker any support during or after (such as access to a support person)

The psychosocial risk management process

Essentially, as shown below, psychosocial risk management is a continuous four-step process.

It's a process of consulting with workers to identify psychosocial hazards (sources of stress) and working in partnership with them to find ways of either eliminating or minimising them.



Assessing risk

Regardless of whether you conduct a formal risk assessment or not, it is important that the range of control measures you have in place reflect a reasonable understanding of the factors displayed below. A risk assessment is one means of documenting how you have considered these factors, but you may choose another way to document your reasoning behind the control measures you have in place.



Assessing and managing the risk of exposure to psychosocial hazards

- » What are the sources of work-related stress for your workers?

- » How often and for how long are they typically exposed to them?

- » Are workers exposed to multiple work-related stressors at the same time?

- » Have you considered other potential risk factors?
For example, consider the physical risks of the work and the work environment, how your workers are supervised and how skilled and experienced they are.

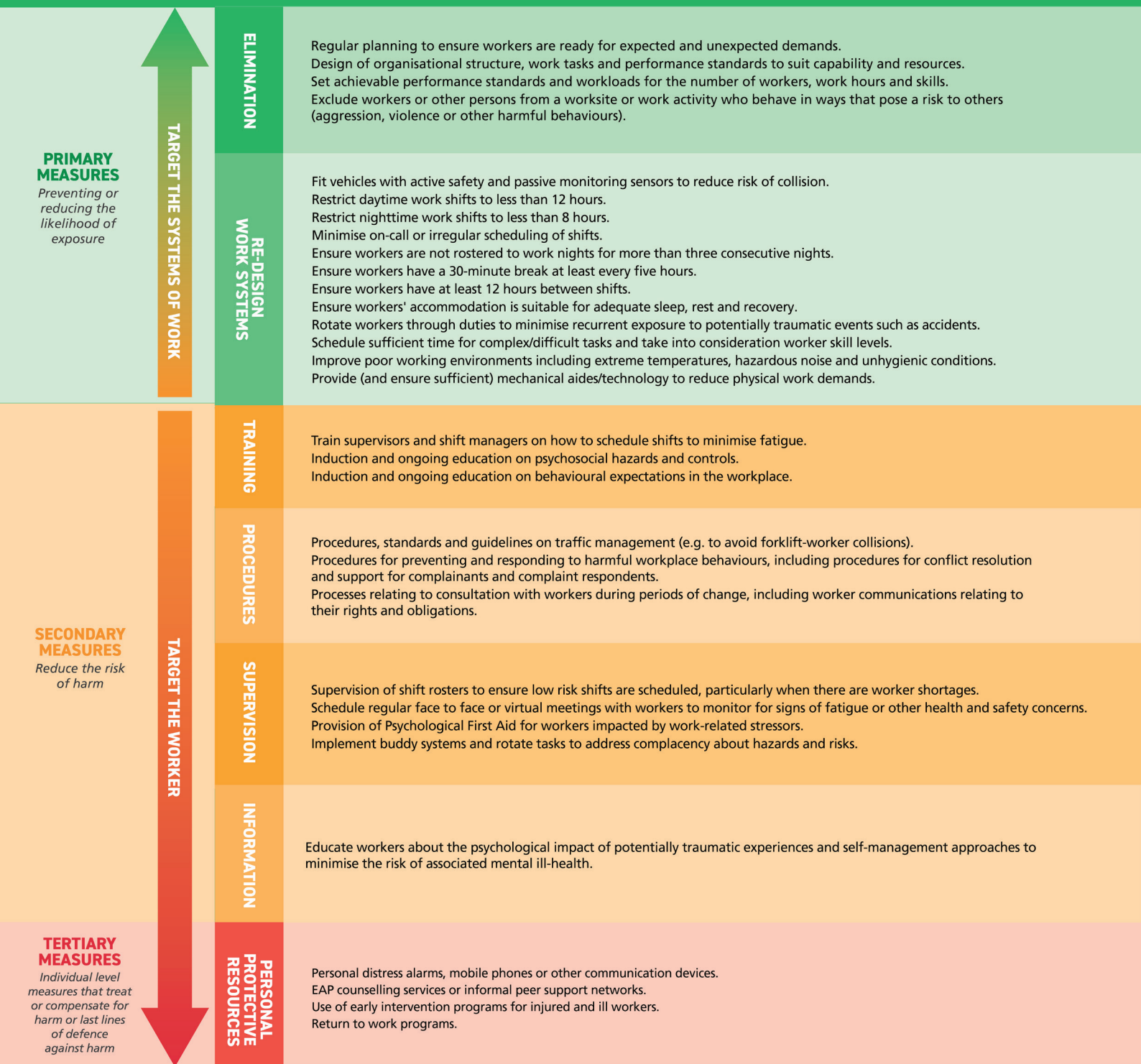
- » Have you considered protective factors?
For example, is there good supervisory support and good quality consultation over WHS matters?

- » How could ongoing exposure affect their health or ability to do their job safely?

- » What existing controls do you have in place?
How much focus is there on addressing the sources of stress rather than just relying on workers to cope?

What are some options for managing psychosocial risks?

Hierarchy of controls for managing psychosocial risks in the agriculture industry



Why is work design a good way of reducing the risk of harm?

Many preventative psychosocial and manual handling risk controls are, in essence, work design interventions. This is because they are a way of *designing out* sources of stress and physical strain in the workplace.

What are some examples of work design?

Setting achievable performance standards and workloads for workers

Workforce planning to ensure the right numbers of people with the right skills, knowledge and attributes are in the right place at the right time

Consideration of how new services, processes, technology or facilities may impact on workers' ability to perform their work safely and effectively

Providing workers with equipment and technological aids to improve task efficiency and to reduce the risk of injuries, accidents and errors

Enabling workers to moderate work pace and load where possible

Job rotation to develop workers' skills and knowledge

Modifying the tasks and responsibilities of a worker who has returned to work following injury or illness

Breaking down complex tasks into smaller, simpler ones and removing unnecessary steps to improve efficiency and reduce errors

Providing clear communication about work processes, including key functions, responsibilities, workflows and timeframes

Ensuring your measures are effective through information, training and instruction

Persons conducting a business or undertaking must ensure that all persons in their workplaces have the following information, training and instruction:



- » Workers are aware of what psychosocial hazards are and how to report them.

- » Persons with management and control of a workplace understand that they have a primary duty of care to protect workers from psychosocial risks.

- » Persons with management and control of a workplace ensure workers have a right to be consulted about psychosocial risk management.
For example, workers are able to suggest how to re-design tasks and processes to reduce sources of stress.

- » Workers and other people in workplaces must take reasonable care for their own health and safety, not expose others to potential harm through their behaviours, and comply with any reasonable instruction that is given by the person with management and control of the workplace.

- » Parties to a complaint about psychosocial hazards (such as bullying) are kept informed about the process and outcomes of the complaint.

- » Workers are aware of all options for raising concerns about psychosocial risks, including where they can take a complaint.
For example, workers know they can go to SafeWork SA if they are dissatisfied with how their employer has managed it.

According to Farmsafe Australia:

Complacency is 'one of the most dangerous and least visible risks' in the hazardous agriculture sector, but can be tackled through strategies that involve 'respecting the routine' and 'challenging the habit'



For more information:

- » Scan the QR code
- » safework.sa.gov.au/agriculture
- » Call us on 1300 365 255



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