

SAFE WORKING PRACTICES FOR TRACTOR OPERATION

February 2026

This step-by-step guide to tractor safety is for everyone who uses a tractor, or tractor-operated machinery. It applies to those working in farming, forestry, horticulture, amenity horticulture and the sports turf industry.

Safety checks

- Am I wearing suitable clothing and footwear?
- Have I read and understood the instruction manual?
- How am I going to do this work?
- Have I carried out pre-start checks of the machinery?
- Do I know enough to work safely?
- Are there a minimum of two people onsite with working radio communication?

Safe stop

- Make sure the handbrake is fully applied.
- Make sure all controls and equipment are left safe.
- Stop the engine.
- Remove the key.

Always use safe stop:

- before leaving your seat; or
- when anyone else approaches; or
- when anyone else is working on the machine.

In position

A tractor can only be safely operated from the driving seat. You must know how to get in and get out safely, how to adjust seats and mirrors and how to recognise controls so you are always in control of your tractor.

Getting in and out

- Always use access steps and handholds.
- Keep floors, doors, pedals and your boots clean and mud-free.
- Do not keep tools, drawbar pins or top links on the cab floor.
- Before leaving the seat follow safe stop.
- Get out facing inwards so that you have a good grip.
- Never get on or off a moving tractor.

Visibility and seat adjustment

- Before carrying out adjustments ensure the tractor is in safe stop.
- Check the seat position – can you operate all controls comfortably?
- Adjust the seat suspension to your weight.
- Make sure mirrors are properly adjusted, doublechecking that you can still see clearly wearing a seat belt.
- Make sure mirrors and windows are clean and give full visibility.

Seat belts

A seat belt will prevent you being thrown out of the cab in an overturn or road accident, where you are most likely to be killed or injured.

- Seat belts are a legal requirement on all tractors fitted with a ROPS since 1976 and **must be used at all times**.
- If the ROPS needs to be folded down to avoid a height restriction or obstruction, then the seat belt **must not be used**, allowing you to jump clear of the cab. Once clear of the obstruction, the ROPS **must be reset and the seat belt used**.

Controls

- Look in the operator's manual to find out what each control does.
- Make sure you know how the controls are operated.
- Never use any control unless you are correctly seated in the cab.
- Know where the controls should be before you start the tractor.
- Never use a machine that you have not been taught how to use.

Hitching

Accidents are common when hitching or unhitching tractor-mounted machines.

To prevent these accidents, remember:

1. Safe stop.
2. Operate controls from the correct position.
3. Never forget your assistants are also at risk.

Key points:

- Make sure you use the right hitch system.
- Only use controls from the operating position.
- Communicate clearly with assistants if you get help with hitching.
- Never stand between the tractor and other machines, or behind them, unless the tractor is in safe stop and the driver is aware of your presence.
- Never stand with your feet under, on or near drawbars.
- Ensure that jacks, skids and other supports are used when applicable and maintained.

Under power

This is the time to check the brakes, the steering and other controls. Also check that no one else is in danger from your tractor before moving off.

- Never drive a tractor or other machinery unless you have been trained to do so.
- Make sure you understand the controls before you operate the tractor.
- Before moving off, always check whether independent brakes are locked together.
- Make sure no one else is near before you start the engine.
- Check no one is in danger before you move.
- Check the brakes and steering operate correctly.
- Make sure you know what each control does.

Dangerous occurrences

Dangerous occurrences are certain incidents with a high potential to cause death or serious injury. Those incidents which must be reported are listed in Schedule 2 of the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR).

There are a number of penalties which could be given to you, depending on the incident and the result, i.e death or serious injury. It is important that you understand that a breach of health and safety duties is seen as a criminal offence.

If convicted, you will have a criminal record in addition to any sentence or penalty issued.

Fatal injuries

There were 23 fatal injuries to workers in 2024/25. This is in comparison with the annual average of 25 fatalities over the five-year period 2020/21-2024/25.

There were 4 fatal injuries to members of the public in 2024/25.

This is in comparison with the annual average of 5 fatalities over the five-year period 2020/21- 2024/25.

Source: RIDDOR, 2024/25 Percentage of fatal injuries by accident kind in Agriculture, forestry and fishing Accident kinds are shown for the top 5 causes of fatal injury. Source: RIDDOR, average over 2020/21-2024/25

HSE Prosecution – with a conviction rate of 95%, you really don't want to have charges laid against you.

Fines handed down by the courts are unlimited, with the possibility of imprisonment up to 2 years.

While only 8% of convictions resulted in immediate custody, a further 25% involved either a suspended sentence or community sentence.

Declaration

I, have read, understand and agree to abide by the legal obligations and procedures set out in the HSE Crick Woodlands Safe Working Practices for Tractor Operation 2026.

Signed

Dated /..... /.....

A copy of these rules is available on request.

Anyone who does not comply with these rules relating to safe working practices, legal compliance, health and safety or endangers others with their actions, will be asked to leave the site.