

Apply for the Victorian Government quad bike safety rebate



The rebate scheme offers \$600 towards installing an operator protective device (OPD) or up to \$1200 for two OPDs, or \$1200 towards an alternate vehicle such as a side-by-side. Find out more and apply today via worksafe.vic.gov.au/quadbikes





No two quad bike rides are the same



David Elder is like any other experienced farmer; hard working, resilient, sincere and had a bulletproof mentality.

After growing up on a farm in Benalla, working as a jackaroo in Western Australia and establishing a steel fabrication business, David landed his dream property — a farm in Bethanga in north-eastern Victoria. His property, typical of the land around Bethanga and many other parts of Victoria, features a combination of rolling hills and pastures.

Over the years, David has come to know this country like the back of his hand. But it's also this familiarity that almost killed him.

'It was a regular day. I'd had ambulance duty the night before and I'd been up at 6:30 in the morning spraying blackberries. I knew the terrain but it was dark, the driveway was steep, and I was tired,' said David.

Suddenly he was in the dirt. His head was stuck between the ground and the seat of his upturned quad bike. David didn't know it yet, but he had extensive injuries, including a fractured skull, jaw, shoulder, collarbone and ribs. He also suffered bleeding on the brain and an acquired brain injury.

David was an experienced quad bike rider. He wasn't going fast at the time of the accident, but he wasn't wearing a helmet and had a tank on the back from spraying blackberries.



'I was very familiar with the area, I'd been up and down that road hundreds of times before. You may do it every day, but no two rides are the same,' said David.

A neighbour and her child found David on their way back from basketball. It was a miracle he survived.

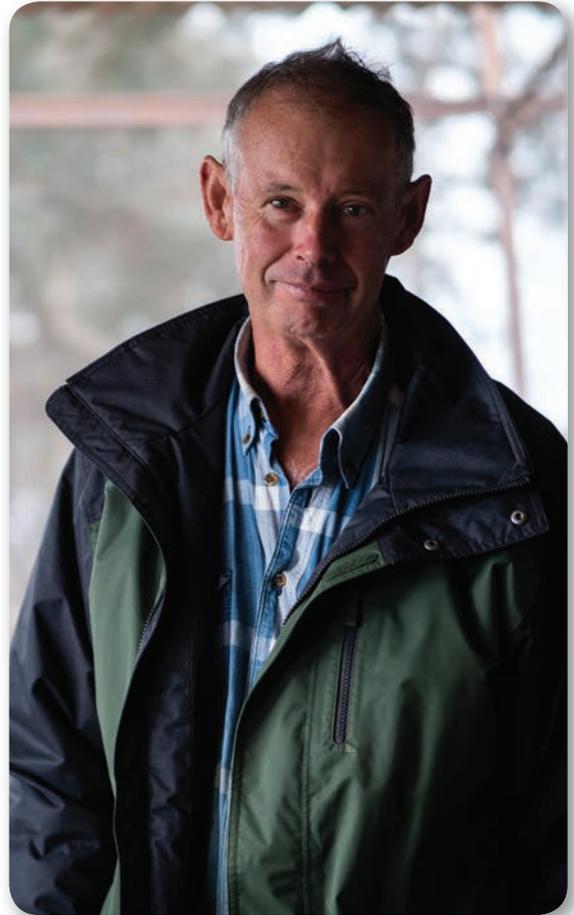
What followed was a farmer's worst nightmare; five days in an induced coma, three months stuck in a Melbourne hospital and many more months of rehabilitation. David couldn't do anything on the farm when he returned – although he tried.

'I couldn't even remember my own birthday or my own kids' names. I don't wish for that to happen to anybody,' said David.

Unfortunately, despite farms only employing 2% of working Victorians, David's story isn't unfamiliar. The truth is, around 30% of Victoria's workplace deaths occur on farms every year. And quad bikes are a leading cause of these deaths and injuries on Australian farms.

Unpredictable weather conditions, mechanical problems and carrying heavy loads are common hazards when operating quad bikes in agricultural workplaces. Even if you travel the same speed, take the same path and complete the same routine like David, it only takes one thing to be different for disaster to strike.

It could be a wash-out on the track after last night's storm, lower tyre pressure on the left-hand side, an incorrectly packed load or unexpected vermin homes – like a rabbit hole.



Whatever the hazard, even though you feel like today's routine is the same as yesterday, some things may be out of your control.

In any of the situations above, your quad bike can tip or roll over even at the slowest of speeds, leaving you at risk of being trapped under the vehicle. For many this has led to tragic deaths from being crushed or from asphyxiation.

That's why no two quad bike rides are the same.

And that's why David is incredibly lucky.

After his accident, David reviewed the best options for his farm work. Now, along with his ute, David uses a side-by-side vehicle with a rollover protection system and seatbelt.

Side-by-side vehicles are included under the Victorian Government quad bike safety rebate.

The rebate is open to farmers whose main source of income is not from farming. It offers up to \$1200 towards installing two operator protective devices (OPD's) or \$1200 towards an alternate vehicle, such as a side-by-side. This is the vehicle David now uses - it's the one that makes him feel safest behind the wheel.

Apply for the Victorian Government quad bike safety rebate via worksafe.vic.gov.au/quadbikes



Of course, there are steps you can take to make your quad bike rides safer, such as wearing a helmet, appropriate loading, not taking passengers and performing regular maintenance checks. Reduce the risks through:

- Choosing the right vehicle for the task. Is a quad bike the most suitable vehicle for the task on your farm? In some cases a ute, tractor or side-by-side vehicle might be a better option.
- Understanding the hazards relating to the task and terrain. What you're using the quad bike for, and where you're using it, can significantly impact your safety.
- Always wearing a helmet. A common complaint from farmers is that helmets are too hot, too heavy or they cannot hear when wearing them. There are options available that don't cover the ears and in situations where quad bikes don't go over 30 kilometres per hour and operate only on the farm, there are lightweight options available with brims and flaps to protect the neck.
- Doing a pre-start check. Pre-start checks can prevent factors that contribute to accidents. Some key things to check include tyre pressure, steering and brakes.
- Understanding the impact of loads and towing. The size, weight and distribution of yourself and what you carry on the quad bike pack rack, can affect your steering and centre of gravity. Ensure you're aware of the manufacturer's limits (check the decal on the quad bike) and account for the rider and load weight, including any towed loads.
- Training, information and instruction. Everyone who uses a quad bike should understand the associated hazards and how to operate it for the task and terrain on the farm. It's an employer's responsibility to ensure operators are trained and assessed as competent. Consider sending workers to a quad bike course with a registered training organisation or, if a worker is an experienced rider, ask someone who understands quad bike operation to assess their skills and/or supervise them until you're confident they can complete the required tasks in the terrain.

It's now seven years after his accident and David is still recovering. He's back on the farm but struggles with balance issues and short-term memory loss. He's also aware of how his injury impacted others, particularly his family and the neighbours who found him.

Despite his restrictions, David remains positive. An active member in the community, he's heavily involved in the local Bethanga Landcare group, still volunteers for Ambulance Victoria, and sits on another half a dozen committees that assist the community. He also advocates strongly for farm safety.

'I learnt the wrong way and I want to change the culture of people taking shortcuts. It's not just people hooning around that have accidents; it's farmers moving around in the field by themselves and thinking about other things,' David said.

You can watch David's full story, find out more about quad bike safety and apply for the Victorian Government quad bike safety rebate via worksafe.vic.gov.au/quadbikes

Article kindly supplied by WorkSafe, a part of the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety.

