



INFORMATION SHEET

Reducing the risks when using side-by-side vehicles

Background

Until recently, quad bikes were the vehicle of choice for many agricultural and farming workers. However, because quad bikes have been involved in a large number of serious injuries and deaths in Western Australia (WA), many businesses have invested in side-by-sides.

Side-by-side vehicles are also known as utility terrain vehicles (UTVs). There are a number of manufacturers of side-by-sides, but the vehicles are largely similar in their design. They have four wheels, roll over protective bars and seats for between two and six passengers, including the operator. They are driven in a similar manner to a car, with a steering wheel and the operator in a seat on one side or the other of the vehicle.



Photograph by Forest and Kim Starr, Wikimedia Commons

Most side-by-sides have a well body which can be used to carry items from one place to another. Many of the manufacturers have also produced attachments for side-by-sides, and these range from gun racks, spray tanks, cargo racks and mesh or metal doors.

Side-by-sides are designed to be safe. Roll over protective bars are certified to protect the occupants within a safe space if the vehicle is involved in a rollover. Seatbelts are fitted to ensure that operators and passengers are restrained within this space in the event of a collision or accident.

Safety factors

Despite the safety factors designed to prevent injury, as the use of side-by-sides in workplaces has risen, so has the number of incidents resulting in injury or death in Western Australian workplaces.

In a workplace, the person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) has a duty to manage risks to health and safety under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2020*. This duty requires the PCBU to identify hazards and implement strategies to reduce the risks, as far as is reasonably practicable, including those presented by mobile plant such as side-by-side vehicles.

Ways to reduce the risks associated with the use of side-by-side vehicles are detailed in the operator's manual and in the use of warning decals on the vehicle.

The safety of workers and others who operate side-by-side vehicles should be managed by undertaking an assessment of the following points.

Selecting the right means of transport

Plan the use of side-by-sides in the workplace. Know the abilities for performance of a side-by-side at your workplace and do not try to operate beyond the vehicle's known capacity.

Operating conditions

Assess the terrain before using a side-by-side to ensure that the operator is not at risk of roll over. Operate the vehicle in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations.

Carrying or towing loads

Properly secure any loads to be carried, consider appropriate speeds, and check that towed items are within towable limits, and the vehicle has not been overloaded.

Training and assessing operators

Ensure that operators have been trained in the use of a side-by-side. This training should include reading the operator's manual and safety warning decals, as well as an assessment of operational skills. When attachments are fitted, training for the use of these items should also be undertaken.

Maintenance and repairs

Ensure that any maintenance, repairs or modifications have been conducted by a competent person, and that regular servicing has been conducted. Drilling and or welding of roll over protection systems (ROPS) can affect the structural integrity of the ROPS and should not be undertaken without approval from the manufacturer.

Operators and passengers

Any person, including children, riding in a side-by-side must do so in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Each person must be seated and forward facing. No person should ride on the tray or be carried by standing on the sideboards. Seat belts should be worn.

Safety devices and lights

Never remove or disable any safety device or light that has been provided by the manufacturer. Safety devices may include seatbelts, forward and rear facing lights, doors (solid or net), and ROPS. When considering the addition of other safety features, ensure that these are compatible with your side-by-side.

Personal protective equipment and clothing (PPE)

Operators and passengers should be provided with appropriate PPE when operating or travelling in side-by-side vehicles. The wearing of helmets is recommended by manufacturers for both operators and passengers. This ensures that head injuries are reduced should the vehicle collide with an item, or need to brake or turn suddenly. Other PPE to consider are enclosed footwear, eye protection and long sleeves and long pants to protect from sun exposure, biting insects and branches entering the cab.

When using a spray tank for chemical application, the operator should remove the helmet once the vehicle is stationary and put on the appropriate PPE for spraying such as a fitted mask. Spraying may also require other personal protective clothing.

Children as operators and passengers

Operator's manuals supply information for the safe use of side-by-sides and give guidance for the use by children. This may be determined by age. Similarly, operator's manuals give information on the safe carrying of children as passengers. This advice should always be followed for the safety of children in your workplace. The fitting of baby seats and capsules should not be undertaken unless the manufacturer has given approval.

Reducing the risks

The addition of side-by-sides to a workplace may significantly reduce the risks of injury to persons who previously operated quad bikes. In choosing the right type and size of side-by-side, you should consider discussing your requirements with an approved supplier who can give you advice and ongoing support.

Side-by-sides may make farming and agricultural work easier for aging workers due to their design and operation. Hand railing, covered roofing, leg protection, windscreens, independent suspension and interior design provides operators and passengers with ergonomic seating and controls.

Ensure that you and your workers conduct a prestart check of the side-by-side before use.

Check items such as:

- tyre wear and inflation
- lights
- horn (where fitted)
- seatbelts
- brakes
- engine fluids
- damage
- leaking fluids
- mirrors.

The wearing of seatbelts and helmets reduces the risks associated with working in an agricultural environment. Using the cab nets and doors prevents serious injury to arms and legs in the event of an incident. Be a good example in your workplace and ensure that workers follow your example. Side-by-sides have safety features for a reason and maintenance of these is imperative.

Further information

SafeWork, New South Wales

[Side-by-side vehicles fact sheet](#)

WorkSafe, Victoria

[Side-by-side vehicle safety](#)

[Don't ignore the seatbelts](#)