

## DEVON FEED MILLS SURVEY OF DELIVERY ARRANGEMENTS - 2017

### BACKGROUND

This report was commissioned as a result of concerns raised by HM Coroner following an Inquest into the death of Mr David Alexander on 17 February 2016. Mr Alexander was killed when his vehicle overturned during a feed delivery to a farm; an alert was sent to the industry at that time. HSE further committed to undertake visits to feed mills in Devon to find out how far they were aware of the risk of vehicle overturn and to understand what steps they were taking to ensure that risk was managed.

Prior to Mr Alexander's death there was an industry-led initiative, which launched in 2013, to improve safety during feed deliveries. The Farm Safety Partnership (FSP) and Agricultural Industries Confederation (AIC) drew up guidance and continue to pursue this as a campaign. The AIC guide is reported to have been directly mailed, by the AIC and members of the FSP, to around fifty thousand farms that receive feed deliveries. The guide promotes dialogue between the farmer and delivery company to ensure that on-site conditions are known and the delivery can be planned. It explicitly raises the issue of slopes and raising vehicle bodies on sloping ground. This guidance was referred to during the Devon feed mills survey.

### THE SURVEY

The HSE survey of Devon feed mills in 2017 involved an initial fact-finding visit to site by a non-warranted Visiting Officer followed up by a visit from an Inspector. In total, 7 sites were visited and the detailed findings are summarised below:

- **Businesses:** the sites visited varied from small businesses to branches of large national organisations.
- **Awareness of the risk:** All of the feed mills visited were aware of the incident resulting in the death of Mr Alexander and this appeared to have galvanised work being undertaken to address the risks from deliveries. All feed mills visited were aware of the industry guidance.
- **Type of deliveries:** one of the seven businesses did not make any bulk/blower deliveries; the two largest organisations (nationals) were trialling non-tipping blower vehicles; the other sites were using a mixture of bulk blower and curtain sided vehicles for deliveries.
- **Site assessment:** Typically, sales representatives made initial visits to new customer sites. However assessments of site conditions for deliveries were usually undertaken later by either a transport/H&S manager (in larger organisations) or the delivery driver themselves, often using a check sheet provided by the company.
- **Sub-contracting:** There was evidence of some sub-contracting of deliveries in smaller businesses. Large organisations and very small businesses did not use any sub-contract drivers. Where sub-contracting was part of the logistics chain, the sub-contract drivers were provided with the same type of information provided to the company's own drivers.

One area for future consideration, although beyond the scope of this survey, is third party supply businesses. Some feed mills were supplying to other businesses that were then running their own sales and delivery operations; these were typically small operators who would be responsible for making their own on-farm delivery arrangements.

- **Systems for tipping loads:** Where tipping was taking place, arrangements ranged from the driver following an understood system of work to cameras being fitted to vehicle cabs so that tipping could be routinely monitored (this in one of the large companies). Another (large) company had fitted tipping sensors which cut off when any tipping above 2 ½ degrees was detected.
- **Arrangements for dealing with blockages:** Arrangements varied across sites from agreed systems, with drivers stopping deliveries if blockages could not be cleared, to no formalised systems. There was anecdotal evidence that blockages were more likely to occur where feed had been left in vehicles overnight.
- **Other matters of concern on site:** Although not the focus of the visits, some other areas of concern were dealt with during visits including risks associated with work at height, exposure to dust and noise and risks from vehicle movements on sites.
  - Three feed mills were given advice on work at height issues by the Visiting Officer which they had actioned by the Inspector visit.
  - One feed mill is now taking action on noise issues.
  - One feed mill is taking action on workplace transport at the mill, to improve worker / vehicle segregation.
  - One feed mill was given advice on respiratory protection.

## CONCLUSION

It was encouraging to see a move towards non-tipping vehicles in the larger organisations; these vehicles will negate the risk from the type of overturn seen in the incident that resulted in Mr Alexander's death. In the meantime, where tipping vehicles are still in use the risk of overturn had been recognised by the feed mills and a variety of arrangements used to address it. Whilst there will always be variation in the way risk is controlled dependant on, for example, the size and nature of the business, there is scope for the industry to do more to encourage good practice among smaller businesses.

This report will be shared with HSE's national agricultural sector group to facilitate:

- Discussion of findings with industry partners
- Intelligence-led future visits to the industry