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Farm Safety Documentation: Explained Simply



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Farm Safety Documentation – Explained Simply

Understanding How SOPs, SWPs, SWMS, RA's and JSAs Work Together.

In agriculture, safety and consistency are just as important as productivity. Whether you're managing a feedlot, operating heavy machinery, or applying chemicals, having the right procedures in place helps protect workers, livestock, crops and the environment.

This article explores the differences between **Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)**, **Safe Work Procedures (SWPs)**, **Risk Assessments (RAs)**, **Job Safety Analyses (JSAs)**, **Safe Work Method Statements (SWMS)**, and **Principal Hazard Management Plans (PHMPs)** - all through the lens of farming and agricultural work.



SOP vs SWP on the Farm

(Using the Same Task: Operating a Tractor)

Feature	Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)	Safe Work Procedure (SWP)
Purpose	Ensure the tractor is operated efficiently and consistently in line with manufacturer's instructions.	Ensure the tractor is operated safely.
Focus	Task steps, equipment use, maintenance routines.	Hazard identification, risk controls, PPE.
Audience	Farmhands, machinery operators, supervisors.	Workers, safety officers, contractors.
Example Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Check fuel and oil levels.• Start-up sequence.• Gear shifting and throttle use.• Post use cleaning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inspect for leaks or damage before use.• Wear seatbelt and hearing protection.• Avoid steep slopes and wet ground.• Keep bystanders clear during operation.

Summary: The SOP ensures the tractor is used correctly; the SWP ensures it's used safely. Together, they help prevent breakdowns and injuries.

How SOPs and SWPs Work Together

SOPs & SWPs are most effective when used together as part of a farm's safety system:

1. Shared Foundation, Different Focus:

SOPs explain how to do a task; SWPs explain how to do it safely.

2. SOPs Inform SWPs:

SWPs often build on SOPs by embedding safety controls into each step.



3. Integrated Training:

Workers are trained using both documents—SOPs for consistency, SWPs for safety.

4. Audit and Review:

Both are reviewed during audits or after incidents to identify gaps.

5. Living Documents:

They should be updated together when equipment, processes, or risks change.

Example:

An SOP for loading stock outlines the process; the SWP adds safety measures like PPE, hygiene protocols, and animal handling precautions. Together, they ensure that agricultural tasks are done **correctly and safely**, every time.

Risk Assessment vs JSA in Agriculture

Feature	Risk Assessment (RA)	Job Safety Analysis (JSA)
Scope	Broad (entire farm, chemical use, large scale machinery operation).	Specific (task like fencing or shearing).
Output	Risk ratings, controls, residual risks.	Step-by-step hazard controls.
Use	Planning and review.	Pre-task safety planning.

Summary: Risk assessments are big-picture tools for the whole operation, while JSAs are task-specific, ideal to use before starting a job like spraying or harvesting.



What is a Safe Work Method Statement (SWMS)?

A **SWMS** is required for high-risk construction work, including some tasks on farms like trenching, working at heights or major construction works.

Feature	Safe Work Method Statement (SWMS)
Purpose	Ensure high-risk tasks are carried out safely.
Includes	Task steps, hazards, controls, monitoring, responsibilities.
Legal Status	Mandatory under WHS laws for high-risk work.

Summary: A SWMS is a comprehensive safety plan for high-risk agricultural tasks, combining elements of SWPs, JSAs, and risk assessments.

What is a Principal Hazard Management Plan (PHMP)?

A **PHMP** is used in agricultural settings where **major hazards** exist—such as confined spaces (e.g., silos), hazardous chemicals, or large-scale machinery operations.

Feature	Principal Hazard Management Plan
Purpose	Manage significant hazards that could cause serious harm.
Scope	Farm wide or operation wide.
Includes	Hazard identification, risk assessment, control measures, monitoring, emergency response.
Relationship with Other Tools	Informs and integrates with SOPs, SWPs, JSAs and SWMS.

Summary: A PHMP is a strategic safety plan for managing major hazards on the farm, such as chemical storage or grain handling systems.



Final Thoughts

In agriculture, safety and efficiency go hand in hand. Here's how these tools work together:

- **SOPs** ensure consistency in farm operations.
- **SWPs** ensure safety in daily tasks.
- **Risk Assessments** identify and evaluate hazards across the farm.
- **JSAs** break down specific jobs like fencing or spraying into safe steps.
- **SWMS** are required for high-risk tasks like trenching or working at heights.
- **PHMPs** provide a high-level plan for managing serious hazards like confined spaces or chemical use.
- **Together, they form a layered and robust safety management system for any agribusiness.**