

Agsafe News

20th Anniversary Edition

20 Years of Agsafe

For 20 years, Agsafe has been helping rural businesses make smarter decisions.

Its programs have changed the face of the industry by promoting improved work health and safety practices for businesses selling and handling agricultural and veterinary chemicals.

Agsafe has also proven to be a vital environmental steward for Australia and continues to do the work through **drumMUSTER** and ChemClear.

For the last 20 years, Agsafe has been publishing its successes in *Rural Business*. To celebrate its 20 year milestone, Agsafe is reflecting on its achievements and recognising some of the people who helped steer the industry in the right direction.

A bit on Agsafe's history

Agsafe was established in 1993, but can trace its roots back to 1987 when the board of the Agricultural and Veterinary Chemical Association (AVCA) agreed to establish an accreditation and training scheme to provide safety advice and knowledge to rural retailers who sold agvet chemicals.



Agsafe staff in 1993

Staff training had begun in 1990 with premises assessments starting in the following year through AVCA.

In 1994, Agsafe was established as a limited company and was authorised by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) to apply trading sanctions on organisations and individuals who did not meet Agsafe accreditation obligations.

This was possible with the support of the agvet chemical suppliers through their membership of AVCA and subsequently, CropLife Australia.

By October 1994, more than 1000 businesses had been accredited through Agsafe.

Agsafe was appointed to undertake the implementation of **drumMUSTER** in 1999 after an agreement was signed by AVCA, the National Farmers' Federation, the Veterinary Manufacturers and Distributors Association and the Australian Local Government Association.

Agsafe initiated ChemClear in 2003, to build on the work undertaken through the government's one-off ChemCollect program.

AgStewardship Australia was created in 2009 and took over the collection of the **drumMUSTER** and ChemClear levy from participating chemical manufacturers. AgStewardship contracted Agsafe to continue to deliver the programs on its behalf.

By 2012, **drumMUSTER** had collected more than 20 million drums, ChemClear had collected and disposed of more than 339,000 L/kg of unwanted chemicals and the Accreditation & Training program had trained about 12,000 staff in the industry.

Gaz's Agsafe Legacy

At the age of 16, Gary was blinded by an accident. He spent two years in hospital and was in and out of the Royal Victorian Blind Institute in Melbourne.

By 18, he started work in the agricultural industry and ended up owning his own Elders store in a small town called Patchewollock, about 50km from Ouyen on the edge of Wyperfeld National Park in Victoria.

Gary became respected not only by his clients, but also his competitors over the years. He was aided by his wife Kay who helped him build a successful business dealing with livestock, rural merchandise and chemicals.

Despite his disability, Gary was one of the first resellers to complete the initial Agsafe training, originally doing his exam in 1989. He also completed the Stage

Two chemical handling, storage and transport course. By 1997, his business had achieved Agsafe accreditation "Gold Status" twice.



Gary Young

Gary was reportedly rarely wrong, with many customers asking "Gaz you're out of wetter" only to be told "open your bloody eyes, it's next to the foam marker."

Relationships key to success for best friends

Best friends Renzo Zulian and Jerome Thompson proved themselves as OHS champions after taking out consecutive Agsafe Excellence Awards in 2000 and 2001.

The two have known each other for nearly 40 years and still run the business, Werribee South Farm Supplies, which also serves as a café



Renzo and Jerome (2001)

and general store and has been there since 1948.

The store is known for serving the best espresso in Werribee, located just outside Melbourne. Renzo said the coffee helps set a "convivial situation" for his clients.

"Customers bring in a coffee and get together with us for a chat while they are picking up supplies," Renzo said.

"We even still serve espresso to our customers."

Renzo also makes many of his customers feel particularly welcome by speaking their language: Italian.

"Maintaining good relationships in a tight knit community has definitely influenced growth," Renzo said.

In 2001, the pair clinched the National Agsafe Excellence Award winning \$1000 in prize money along with a \$5000 contribution towards an overseas trip to study agribusiness practices in other countries.

Jerome said they flew up to Sydney

for the awards night and the announcement of the national winner.

"There were CEOs and managers of chemical companies and the heads of CRT were there – it was a prestigious sort of event," he said.

"We were up against other stores that were brand spanking new. So it was impressive for us to win, our store was a bit old and worn out but we were still accredited."

Werribee South Farm Supplies is now accredited by Victorian Agsafe Facilitator Dr John Fennell. Jerome said John has been a consistent assessor.

"For a short time in the beginning we were assessed by a Dutch gentleman by the name of Okke Jansma. He put the fear of God into us," he said.

"We feared him that much we went to the extremes to become accredited. We had a few sleepless nights before he came. It was an old store and we were running against our competitors who had new operations."

Jerome said nothing much has changed in the 12 years since they won the award.

"It's still a family run business. It's evolved with a few changes here and there but the fundamentals of the business are still here," he said.



Jerome and Renzo (2013)

Agsafe invested in industry's safety

While hundreds of businesses were seeing the value of Agsafe during the organisation's early days, some businesses needed convincing.

One of the many wake-up calls for the industry came when five fire fighters were hospitalised after battling a chemical fire at a pest control premises in Melbourne in April 1994.

The fire fighters used water to extinguish an aluminium phosphide fire creating toxic fumes.

It was later discovered the site didn't have the proper placarding in place to indicate the presence of the chemical. Proper placarding advice is something Agsafe prides itself on.



"CropLife Australia's wholly owned subsidiary, Agsafe and its programs are the foundation of the Australian plant science industry's commitment to remaining world leaders in industry stewardship. CropLife and its member companies spend millions of dollars each year on stewardship programs to promote a life-cycle approach to the management of crop protection products and ensure that products are developed, sold, used and disposed of appropriately.

The work and achievements of Agsafe are indicative of the plant science industry's commitment to whole-of-life stewardship. Since their inception, Agsafe's Accreditation & Training, *drumMUSTER* and ChemClear programs have allowed farmers

and industry to work together to reduce the environmental footprint of the agricultural industry and ensure long term sustainability.

CropLife is pleased to be partnered with the National Farmers' Federation and the Australian Local Government Association in this important endeavour. We take pride in the great success of the programs and the important role they play in assisting farmers and industry to achieve genuine sustainability for agriculture."

CropLife Australia Chief Executive Officer, Matthew Cossey

Agsafe arrives during changing industry

By the mid-1990s, reports were growing that government agencies were cracking down on rural retailers.

Government inspectors were targeting rural businesses across NSW, Victoria and South Australia with some businesses incurring heavy fines for storing products that were out of date.

There was added pressure for Agsafe to get the industry accredited and compliant for its own good.

By October 1995, more than 1000 stores were accredited through Agsafe with about 10,000 people having been trained in under five years. This represented about half the industry at the time.



Agsafe General Manager Leonie Day presents the first Premises Certificate to Chris Marsden, Warehouse Manager of Kemcon in 1990.

The biggest push to get businesses on board was from Agsafe members. A survey conducted during the early 1990s found the biggest concern from members was that Agsafe wasn't doing enough about businesses who weren't accredited.

Vernon Keighley, Agsafe Operations Manager from 1994 to 1999, said the level of enthusiasm from the industry was incredible.

"A Safety Officer at Primac used to pressure me into putting sanctions on his own stores in western Queensland where the stockies were giving him a hard time," he said.

While Agsafe kept businesses compliant, it also fought to get rid of tough restrictions and unnecessary government red tape.

In 1997 Agsafe was responsible for negotiating an exemption for forklifts to be used in situations where flammable chemicals were stored.

Agsafe also helped to change laws in Victoria during the 1990s so stores were allowed permits to store up to 2100 litres of Class 6, up to 5000 litres of Class 8 and up to 7500 litres of dangerous goods.

It wasn't long before

stories of out-of-control fires and speared chemical containers were being replaced with fire containment management plans and proper traffic flows.

A year after the fire in Melbourne, Agsafe accredited store TP Jones & Co in Launceston, Tasmania was devastated by fire.

Fire fighters were warned that chemicals were on the premises thanks to proper placarding.

All chemicals were also stored well away from any potential ignition sources.

In the aftermath, TP Jones staff found time to send a letter to Agsafe. "Whilst TP Jones praised the efforts of the fire fighters in their attempts to control the fire, some of the credit must go to Agsafe, for without their guidelines, things could have been much worse."

"Credit must go to Agsafe, for without their guidelines, things could have been much worse."

"All Agsafe accredited premises are required to submit their emergency plan in order to become accredited, and it certainly pays off. This would not have been the case if TP Jones had not been brought into the Agsafe program."



"Like many in our industry, I have spent my whole life involved in agriculture, having grown up on a cropping farm, studying agriculture at university and then having a career in the ag supplies industry. In that time I have come to really appreciate the incredibly important role that Agsafe plays in ensuring that rural retail staff and their customers safely return home to their families at the end of each working day.

I remember vividly the days of dirt floor storage sheds and "gasoline cowboys" delivering drums of product in the boot of their car. Agsafe has played a critical role in helping lift the standards of chemical storage and handling to today's highly trained personnel operating from state of the art, purpose built facilities around Australia.

A recent Federal Agriculture Minister told me that he could not think of any other industry that had taken their stewardship responsibilities more seriously than the agvet chemical industry. To think that the Federal Government had not had to intervene with draconian legislation, as they have in many other industries, is a credit to our industry and something we should all be proud of.

I am convinced that retailers' ongoing involvement in Agsafe will not only help to keep their businesses safe, but will also help keep them sustainable in an ever changing and challenging market place."

Chairman of Agsafe, Vice President of CropLife, Managing Director of Sipcam Australia, Damien Ryan

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1993 1994 1995 1996 1997 1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013

Agsafe Excellence Awards initiated to recognise businesses going above and beyond to meet their work safety needs.
 1275 stores accredited by May 1996.

drumMUSTER launched in December 1998 by Senator Judith Troeth.

Agsafe and **drumMUSTER** websites go live.

1345 stores accredited.
 Reaccreditation course "Chemical Handling Storage and Transport" released.

2.5 million drums collected nationwide with nearly 95% of councils on board.

ChemClear pilot scheme initiated in 2003. Fully operational by 2004 with over 10,000 litres collected/scheduled for collection by December.

drumMUSTER collects 1 million drums in one year for the first time.

ACCC authorisation renewed for three years.

Agsafe re-brands the training arm from "Guardian" to "Accreditation & Training".

AgStewardship created to oversee IWRS programs.

New Online Training established. A new Basic Personnel Accreditation course released.

Introduction of Advanced and Essential level store accreditation.

20 millionth drum collected. Celebration at Henty Field Days, NSW.

Workplace assessments can now be conducted by managers in their own workplace.

New Induction course released.



AVCA initiates national campaign "Operation Clean Rinse", a precursor to **drumMUSTER**.

10,500 people trained in Agsafe Basic Training.

"Think Safe, Look Safe, Be Agsafe" becomes Agsafe's new slogan after running a competition for members to come up with a catchy tagline.

Project "LOVE AND CARE" - *Ute it, Don't Boot it* launched in WA in 1998.

Industry Waste Reduction Scheme launched.

Agsafe appointed to implement and manage the **drumMUSTER** program.

Application for use of levy in **drumMUSTER** program made with ACCC.

Agsafe helps other parts of the world on effective stewardship through presentations to the people of Papua New Guinea and Western Samoa.

drumMUSTER's first collection centre opened in Gunnedah in May 1999.



Coorong Council collects a record 32,000 drums by the end of 2001.

304 councils signed up to IWRS.

Record 13 staff trained in one course at Serve-Ag by Agsafe Facilitator John Fennell.

Agsafe Accreditation branded as "Guardian". First online training course launched.

drumMUSTER establishes a 25% drum return rate within the chemical industry.

Agsafe introduces 1080 Training.

10 millionth drum collected. John Powell a canegrower from QLD delivers the milestone drum.



Agsafe Achievers commences, recognising exceptional stores. New logo and branding introduced.

Agsafe celebrates its 20th Anniversary.

- 12,000 individual staff trained by Agsafe since 1993.
- More than 2000 businesses accredited since 1993.
- More than 100 Agsafe Excellence and Achiever awards.
- 22 million drums collected and recycled through **drumMUSTER**.
- 387,000 litres of chemicals collected and disposed through ChemClear.

The High Achievers

Agsafe was in full swing by the mid-1990s. Training and accreditation numbers were at their peak, while the industry was quickly accepting the importance of safe and effective business practices.

Trainers and facilitators on the frontlines were full of stories about members going above and beyond their call of duty to safety in the workplace.

A national award scheme was created by Agsafe in 1996 to recognise the clear standouts in the industry.

The award would establish state winners with an overall national winner recognising outstanding contributions to safety standards.

Calls for nominations went out to members and *Rural Business* readers in early 1996.

Riverina Spraying Service from Wagga Wagga, NSW was announced as winners of the inaugural national "Rural Business Excellence in Accreditation Award" at the 1996 Avcare convention.

The next year, agribusiness Serve-Ag took out the national award for its brand new store in Devonport, Tasmania. Today the site serves as the company's headquarters.

Serve-Ag Chairman Buz Green said he was enormously proud of the achievement looking back.

"We were absolutely delighted. We had been in the industry for a while and had been aware of Agsafe. We set out on a green field site to build a facility that would meet our needs at the time and into the future," he said.

"The store stood the test of time. We have expanded a little bit since we built it 20 years ago, but we provided for expansion. It's still a very, very functional facility."

Buz won a trip for two to the US to get a closer look at how their agribusinesses solved safety issues.

The award was redesigned in 2003 and

focused on winners at a local level. Winners were judged on commitment to the end user, site layout, design and safety management, environmental initiatives and OHS.

The award was again rebranded in 2010 as Agsafe Achievers.



"It behoves people in the industry to meet a standard. There's a much greater expectation now of environmental sensitivity and workplace safety and Agsafe is a very important component of that, not just in storage and handling, but also in understanding technology and giving advice."

Serve-Ag Chairman, Buz Green

Love and Care to Ute It, Don't Boot It

One of Agsafe's most successful safety campaigns was born out of a number of horror stories.

One story included a woman who unwittingly placed a leaking 10 litre container of organophosphate insecticide in the boot of her sedan with her three children. The mother then drove 40km to her property.

When the family arrived at their home the woman felt nauseous and one of her children was vomiting. The closest medical centre was 140km away.

It was incidents like these that prompted Agsafe to find new ways to promote the safe transportation of agvet chemicals on a national scale.

Agsafe looked to the success of Project Love & Care, a joint initiative with Avcare that had been launched in WA during the late 1990s.

The project was created to encourage a united approach by the agvet industry in the promotion of safe transportation practices.

All rural merchandise distributors agreed to advertise and circulate the message throughout their sales outlets.

The campaign had reached every state and territory in Australia by 1999, adopting the slogan, "Ute It, Don't Boot It" as its official new name.

The campaign continues to help resellers make sure customers are loading their rural chemicals onto a ute, truck or trailer and are firmly secured.

Stewardship comes to play

Rinse 'em out, Round 'em up, Run 'em in. With that simple call to action, **drumMUSTER** grew from a small agricultural recycling program into a national industry stewardship success story.

For decades, farmers had been dealing with plastic and metal packaging for agvet chemicals the only way they knew: burning or burying them.

Many farmers accumulated stockpiles of drums and sometimes turned a blind eye when strong winds or floods picked them up and dumped them in waterways and other inappropriate places.

Some stockpiles of white drums had grown so large they could be seen from space. The industry decided to do something about the problem and enlisted its representative body to help.



A common sight before **drumMUSTER** was established in 1998

The Agricultural and Veterinary Chemical Association took on the challenge by launching "Operation Clean Rinse", a program to educate farmers on proper rinsing, cleaning and disposal of chemical containers.

The program laid down the foundations for a container management system that could be delivered across the country.

The Industry Waste Reduction Scheme was established in 1998 with the current signatories being CropLife Australia, the National Farmers' Federation, the Animal Health Alliance, the Veterinary Manufacturers and Distributors Alliance and the Australian Local Government Association.



The launch of **drumMUSTER** in Gunnedah, 1999

The scheme set down the fundamentals of **drumMUSTER** which are still used today. The program required local governments to set up sites for farmers to drop off their clean, empty agvet chemical containers and to organise the inspection of containers.

Participating chemical manufacturers agreed to fund the program by setting a 4 cents per litre/kilogram levy on all non-returnable products over 1 L/kg.

The levy would be passed on to distributors, who in turn would pass it on to farmers and other users.

drumMUSTER was officially launched on 1 December 1998 and held its first collection in Gunnedah in May 1999. More than 130 councils had signed up to the program in 2000 and collected one million drums by 2001.

In the following years, the program

signed up more than 300 councils, establishing more than 760 **drumMUSTER** sites at local tips, recycling hubs and local charity groups.

Last year the program reached a pinnacle milestone: 20 million drums in just over 13 years of operation. The total currently stands at more than 22 million.

ChemClear joins Agsafe

Equally concerning for the agvet chemical industry was the stockpiling of old and unused agvet chemicals in sheds across the country.

Along with **drumMUSTER**, the Industry Waste Reduction Scheme was developing plans to deal with chemicals that were being hoarded, potentially causing an environmental or health problem.

A year after launching **drumMUSTER**, rumblings of ChemClear were already starting to make waves in the industry.

ChemCollect, a one-off Government funded collection scheme, was in full swing by 2000, collecting unwanted and unregistered agvet chemicals including highly toxic organochlorine pesticide waste. ChemClear took over from ChemCollect once the collection was complete.

ChemClear would be industry funded under the same scheme as **drumMUSTER** and undertake collections in each state.

The program was fully established in 2003. By 2005, it had been launched in NSW, Queensland and Victoria. By 2008, it had run collections in Western Australia, NSW, South Australia and Queensland.

ChemClear intended to clear up chemical products from manufacturers who paid the levy to fund the program.

But as ChemClear quickly learnt, a large proportion of chemical users had products with an unknown origin which didn't fall under the ChemClear scheme.

ChemClear National Manager Lisa Nixon said as time went on more and more farmers were calling up about theirs drums with no idea what was in them.

"The label had either disappeared, the chemical decanted into other vessels or people had inherited chemicals that had been sitting in sheds for decades," she said.

To cope with the problem, ChemClear established the Group 2 category for users to register their products.

"Unlike the chemicals that fall under the levy, Group 2 chemicals aren't collected for free," Lisa said.

"Users pay for the cost of disposal, which can be very expensive, but it's not possible to call on chemical companies to foot the bill as it is no longer possible to identify the manufacturer."

Despite the cost, hundreds of waste holders have disposed of their Group 2 chemicals through ChemClear.

In just under 10 years, ChemClear has collected and disposed of more than 387,000 L/kg of unwanted and out-of-date chemical products.



"Agsafe remains as important today as it was when the industry started it more than 20 years ago. The new work health and safety laws in place across Australia make it

critical that store managers provide a safe workplace for their staff – which includes making sure they are appropriately trained. Agsafe helps Ag-Link and other rural stores to meet their legal obligations for safety and environment protection. With the help that Agsafe provides, managers and staff can concentrate on running a successful business."

General Manager of AgLink, Bill Dowdle

Agsafe Trainer's passion for ag

It's not hard to see that Rosemary Henderson has a passion for the ag industry.

She joined Agsafe during its infancy as a course provider when staff training first began in 1990 and has remained a trainer ever since.

Rosemary got her start in the agricultural chemical industry, working at Hoechst Agrivet for 11 years in research and development after finishing her Agriculture Science degree.

She left Hoechst to start her own business, Protech Consulting in 1989, providing technical services to help register crop protection and animal health products which she still runs today.

But it was her drive to get out of the office and meet people in the field that attracted her to Agsafe.

"When the opportunity came up for Agsafe I thought 'hey, that would be all right'. I thought I would get out and about actually training people in the field and finding out from people what's going on," she said.

Over the past 20 years, Rosemary has trained thousands of agribusiness staff members in proper handling and storing of potentially dangerous agvet chemicals.

Rosemary has also been the recipient of numerous industry awards including achievements through Agsafe and CropLife.



Rosemary awarded Agsafe Course Provider of the Year along with John Horley in 1993



Management consultant and regular contributor to *Rural Business*, Peter Cox

"I have always been a supporter of Agsafe over the last 20 years. As a commentator on financial management in rural merchandise if one follows the principles of good training and the accreditation process provided by Agsafe the savings for the store can be enormous. Think of this: if through poor handling of product and forklift usage, a \$300 drum of chemicals is speared and leaks, not only are there costs involved in the clean-up, but the store needs to generate sales of \$15,000 to replace the drum. How did I arrive at \$15,000? The cost of the drum \$300 divided by the average net profit margin in the industry after tax of 2%."

She said she has been committed to helping farmers any way she could.

"I always wanted to help farmers whatever my role was in agriculture. I wanted to feel I was actually helping Australian farmers," she said.

She quickly learnt that resellers were valuable in understanding farmers' problems.

"These were still the days where many stores had wooden floors. When I went out on my own and did get more involved with Agsafe, I felt 'well this is going to take a little bit of work to get everyone on board', but as soon as they were, it was good," she said.

Rosemary said Agsafe has helped transform the industry, making it more professional and safer.

"A couple of years down the track from Agsafe's beginnings, resellers have turned around and said 'just as well we did that'."

The Future of Agsafe

As we celebrate 20 years we're also looking towards celebrating 20 more.

Agsafe regularly seeks feedback from its members and other stakeholders and has adapted towards an evolving industry. This includes introducing a new Code of Practice to reflect the changes in Work Health and Safety laws across the country.

The new Code includes updated legislative requirements and will act as an aid to any manager concerned

about compliance. The Code is like having an Agsafe facilitator in your business.

Agsafe has also expanded its resources to include new online training modules such as the improved Induction Course.

The course introduces key factors of the industry to newcomers, ensuring they understand their legal obligations in the workplace from day one.



Discussions at the Agsafe Conference, 2013

Accreditation & Training is also set to release an interactive database for members. It will also expand members training under a new Points Scheme that will allow employees to remain accredited through relevant external training, not just Agsafe training

The reach of the **drumMUSTER** program will continue to expand, with a focus on metropolitan and peri-urban areas.

ChemClear will also be working on how to better assist farmers to get rid of their Group 2 chemicals, which continue to be stored across Australia.

But most importantly, Agsafe will continue to provide the best advice and training to ensure businesses are making the smartest decisions when it comes to the safe handling, storage and selling of agvet chemicals.