FREE TEMPLATE

Combine Harvester SOP

A standard operating procedure for farm harvester operation: pre-season and daily checks, safe start-up, operating, unblocking, fire precautions, road travel and shutdown.

How to use this template

Replace the text in [square brackets] with your own details, delete what does not apply and add what does. Blue hints inside the form cells describe what goes there; delete them as you fill the form in.

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1. Procedure details

Farm / business	
Machine	[Make, model, year, fleet number]
Front(s) used	[Draper / auger / pick-up; width]
SOP prepared by	[Name, date]
Operators consulted	
Approved by	[Name, date]
Review	[Before each harvest, after any incident, and when the machine or front changes]

2. Who may operate and what they must have

- Only operators who have been trained on this machine by [the owner / a competent operator], have read the operator manual and this SOP, and have been signed off in section 10.
- A driver licence appropriate to the machine is required for any travel on public roads; check the state road rules for conditional registration, width limits, pilot vehicles and lighting.
- No one under 16 operates the harvester; passengers only where the cab has a second seat with a seat belt.
- Operators are fit for work: adequate sleep, no alcohol or impairing drugs, breaks at least every [two] hours during long shifts, water in the cab.
- PPE in the cab: hearing protection for work outside the cab, gloves, eye protection, sun protection, enclosed boots, a charged phone or UHF radio.

3. Pre-season checks

Item	Yes	No	N/A
Operator manual in the cab; service completed as scheduled and recorded	☐	☐	☐
All guards and shields fitted and secure: drive belts, chains, augers, PTO, unloading auger, straw chopper	☐	☐	☐
Access steps, handrails and platforms sound; non-slip surfaces clean	☐	☐	☐

Item	Yes	No	N/A
Fire extinguishers: at least two (one in the cab, one at ground level), correct type, within service date, mounted and accessible; a water fire-fighting unit available in the paddock	☐	☐	☐
Electrical wiring inspected for chafing; battery terminals clean and covered; bearings checked and replaced where worn	☐	☐	☐
Exhaust system, turbo and manifold shields in place; heat shields intact	☐	☐	☐
Lights, beacons, mirrors, horn, reversing alarm and camera working	☐	☐	☐
Brakes, steering and tyres checked; tyre pressures as per manual	☐	☐	☐
Header trailer, chaser bin hitches and safety chains inspected	☐	☐	☐
Emergency stop controls and seat switch working	☐	☐	☐

4. Daily pre-start

Item	Yes	No	N/A
Walk around: no leaks, no loose parts, no crop or chaff build-up on the engine, exhaust, bearings or belts	☐	☐	☐
Blow down or brush off chaff and dust from the engine bay and around the exhaust; check again at lunch and when conditions are hot and windy	☐	☐	☐
Guards in place; no tools left on the machine	☐	☐	☐
Fire extinguishers in place and charged; water unit full and at the paddock	☐	☐	☐
Fluids checked: engine oil, coolant, hydraulic oil, fuel; no fuel spills	☐	☐	☐
Front attached and locked; hydraulic and electrical couplings connected	☐	☐	☐
Cab clean, windows clear, seat belt working, phone or radio charged	☐	☐	☐
Weather and fire danger checked; harvest restrictions (fire danger rating, harvest ban or code) known for the day	☐	☐	☐
Paddock checked for obstacles, power lines, steep ground, wet areas and people	☐	☐	☐

5. Safe operating procedure

1. Before starting, confirm no one is on or near the machine or the front. Sound the horn, wait, then start from the operator’s seat only.
2. Engage the threshing and front drives at low engine speed, then bring up to operating speed. Listen for unusual noise and check the monitors before entering the crop.
3. Keep every person at least [20] m from the machine while it is working. Stop the front before anyone approaches; chaser bin drivers stay in their vehicles during unloading.
4. Keep clear of overhead power lines: know the line locations in each paddock and the clearance distance that applies in your state before unfolding the auger or raising the front; never unload under power lines.
5. Work across slopes with care and avoid steep ground; slow down for turns, headlands and rough ground; never operate with the grain tank over-full on a slope.
6. Monitor temperatures and watch for smoke, smell or unusual noise. At any sign of fire: stop in a bare area if possible, shut down, get off upwind, call 000 and fight the fire only if safe to do so.
7. Stop, lower the front to the ground, shut off the engine and remove the key before leaving the seat for any reason.
8. Take breaks on schedule; stop work if visibility, fire danger or fatigue make it unsafe.

6. Clearing blockages and maintenance

Never clear a blockage with the machine running

Entanglement in a running front, feeder, auger or chopper is the most common fatal injury on harvesters. The reversing function and the engine are both stopped and the key is removed before anyone touches the machine.

1. Disengage the front and threshing drives, lower the front, shut off the engine, remove the key and keep it in your pocket.
2. Wait for all moving parts to stop. Allow hot components to cool before working near the engine or exhaust.
3. Engage the header safety lock or stops before working under a raised front; never rely on the hydraulics alone.
4. Use the reversing function from the seat where fitted, with no one near the front; otherwise clear by hand with the machine stopped, using tools rather than hands where possible.
5. Replace every guard before restarting. Confirm everyone is clear, sound the horn, and restart from the seat.
6. Maintenance beyond daily checks is done with the machine isolated: key removed, battery isolator off, hydraulic pressure released, wheels chocked, and tagged out if more than one person could restart it.

7. Fire precautions

- Know the fire danger rating and any harvest restriction or code of practice for the day; stop harvesting when the trigger in your state or district is reached.
- A water fire-fighting unit (minimum [600] L) with a working pump is in the paddock being harvested, and a mobile phone or UHF radio is in every machine.
- Clean chaff and dust from the engine bay, exhaust and bearings at least twice a day, more often in hot and windy conditions; check bearings for heat at breaks.
- Refuel only with the engine off and cool, away from the crop; carry no fuel in the cab.
- Keep a cultivated or bare strip available to park a burning machine on; have an agreed emergency plan with the chaser bin and truck drivers.
- If fire starts: stop the machine, shut down, get clear upwind, call 000 with the paddock location, then fight the fire only if it is small and safe to do so.

8. Road travel

- Remove the front and carry it on the header trailer unless the machine is permitted to travel with the front attached in your state; secure the trailer with safety chains and working lights.
- Fold the unloading auger, empty the grain tank, and switch on beacons and lights; display the signs and use the pilot vehicle the state rules require for the width.
- Check the route for low power lines, narrow bridges, overhanging trees and weight limits; plan the time of day to avoid school buses and peak traffic.
- Drive at a speed the machine and the trailer can stop from safely; pull over to let traffic pass where it is safe.

9. Shutdown and end of day

Item	Yes	No	N/A
Machine parked on level, bare ground away from the crop and buildings; front lowered; park brake on	☐	☐	☐
Engine idled to cool before shutdown; key removed	☐	☐	☐
Engine bay and exhaust cleaned of chaff; machine checked for hot spots before leaving it	☐	☐	☐
Faults, near misses and fire incidents recorded and reported to the owner / manager	☐	☐	☐
Fuel and water units refilled for the next day	☐	☐	☐

10. Operator sign-off

I have been trained on this machine, I have read the operator manual and this procedure, and I will follow them. I will stop the machine and remove the key before leaving the seat or clearing a blockage.

Operator name	Trained by	Date	Operator signature

Need the document that goes with it?

Header / Harvester Operations SWMS: swms.ohconsultant.com.au/swms/purchase/agriculture-header-harvester-ops

The SOP tells the operator how to run the machine. The SWMS is the hazard-and-control document a contract harvester or farm employer is asked for, with the risk ratings written and prepared for your state.

All free templates: swms.ohconsultant.com.au/swms/free-resources

General information, not legal advice. Work health and safety laws differ between states and territories: check the requirements that apply where the work is done, and the principal contractor's own site requirements.