

FOR Thursday 23 May 2019

By Chairman, Kevin Borg

Safety alert with the start of the 2019 crushing season

It is now only a week away from the beginning of the 2019 crushing season in the central region and in the lead-up growers and contractors are preparing for what we hope will be a better crop season than 2018.

Estimates for our mills have been finalised with Mackay Sugar hoping to process 5.1 million tonnes and Plane Creek 1.3 million tonnes. Mackay Sugar will have a staggered start from Tuesday 4 June and Plane Creek has set its start date as Tuesday 18 June.

The crushing season brings with it an array of added safety hazards including an increased amount of traffic on our roads with activity in rural and some residential areas.

The sugar industry utilises special heavy equipment that becomes functional from about now until the crop has been bought in - usually for between a five and six month period. Because it is heavy and slower than normal road transport, this machinery brings added threats and danger to our local road network. During the crush, laden vehicles merge onto and leave the road networks frequently throughout the day and night and extra care must be taken by the public while negotiating with this traffic.

Level crossings and locomotives are the other hazard to watch out for 24 hours per day when using the roads. Most level crossings on the most popular roads are marked with signage and lights but there are a few in cane growing areas that are not so conspicuous.

Always take care and be warned that a collision with a laden locomotive will not often give you a second chance. Locomotives do not have the ability to brake fast and may take anything up to and in excess of a kilometre to come to a stop.

Children can be at particular risk on farms and near rail networks during the busy crushing season as haulout drivers have a limited field of vision. Parents must ensure their children are kept out of danger at all times to avoid the potential for a tragedy. Motor bikes are another real safety threat and recreational riding on farms should be avoided.

Growers and contractors themselves have a responsibility to themselves and their employees that their machinery is kept in good condition. Care must particularly be taken while working around electrical assets. It is important that everyone involved should make themselves familiar with the existence of this infrastructure in their work areas and the exclusion zones that apply. Contact with electricity can be fatal. For more information visit the Queensland Government's Electrical safety in the rural industry webpage:

<https://bit.ly/2Wca5Pp> or call the Community Safety Team at Ergon on 1300 736 349 (option 6).

Canegrowers Mackay is very conscious of all these issues and warns one and all either working within the industry or traversing the same areas to stay alert. Our goal is a fatality and injury free crush and that can only be achieved with everyone's care and cooperation. Canegrowers will keep the public updated on the progression of the crushing throughout the season.