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## Field notes and road rules

**Tractor safety guidelines:** When it comes to tractor safety, knowledge is power, so the more you learn about your tractor, its implements and the area you'll be working in, the safer your farm or ranch will be.

According to the 2015 American Society of Safety Engineers Farm Safety Fact Sheet for Rural Areas, most farm-related incidents are caused by machinery, with rollovers being the leading cause of serious injuries.



**It's important to know that tractor accidents are often preventable, and usually involve:**

- Rollovers
- Run overs
- Blind spots
- Entanglements

**Here are some tips to help you stay safe:**

**Rollovers**

- Be sure your tractor is equipped with a ROPS (roll over protective structure) and a seat belt. OSHA regulations require ROPS for equipment operated by employees
- Always use the seat belt
- Back up steep slopes
- Be aware of uneven ground and large obstacles
- Avoid wet or muddy fields
- Drive tractors slowly

**Run overs**

- Always turn off engine off when you're not in the driver's seat and engage brakes
- Never allow extra riders – it's distracting and unsafe

**Blind spots**

- Never allow children to play or hide around tractors or other equipment

**Entanglements**

- Be sure your PTO (power takeoff) shield is in place or replace it
- Always walk around an operating PTO, do not step over it
- Don't wear loose fitting clothing or allow loose, long hair around machinery
- Disengage power and turn off engine before trying to manually clear a clogged machine
- Remove the key and drop it in your pocket to prevent anyone else from starting the machine

**Common types of accidents**

**Left-turn collision**

The left-turn collisions are frequent, and happen when farm equipment is planning to make a left turn while the motorist behind the farm vehicle decides to pass.

**Rear-end collision**

The speed difference between agricultural equipment and other motor vehicles creates this potential hazard. If a car traveling 55 mph comes up on a tractor that's moving 15 mph, it only takes five seconds to close a gap the length of a football field between the car and the tractor. Drivers have only a few seconds to react and slow down.

**Passing collision**

Many collisions occur when motorists pass farm vehicles going in the same direction. While you may want to drive your tractor or equipment as far to the right as possible, a better strategy is to stay in your lane and not get over too far to the right so drivers don't try to pass you within the same lane.

**Crossroads collision**

Farm operators transporting agricultural equipment face a challenge taking their slow-moving equipment across an intersection, and it becomes even more challenging when traffic is moving at a high speed.

**Oncoming collision**

Collisions also occur when motorists pass oncoming farm vehicles, as some equipment is extra wide or long.



### Tractor safety on the road

Farm vehicles and equipment on public roads can create safety issues. The National Ag Safety Database (NASD) has found:

- Crash fatality rates in the most rural counties are almost double the rate in urban counties
- Rural crashes are more frequent, more severe and more likely to result in death than urban crashes
- Certain types of crashes, such as those between motor vehicles and farm vehicles, are unique to rural environments, and usually involve slow moving tractors with trailing equipment and higher speed motor vehicles
- Tractors were found to be involved in the majority of crashes on roadways
- In 23% of the cases where the farm operator was issued a citation, lighting and yield violations were noted. In at least 11% of the cases where the farm operator was cited, the crash occurred in the evening and the tractor was not utilizing adequate lighting
- Most farmers believe driving their tractors on rural roads is more dangerous now than it was five years ago
- As the size of farm equipment grows, increasingly, there is a lack of space on rural roads
- Paved rural roads are often 18-20 feet wide and machinery is often over 13 feet wide
- Even though some newer machinery travels up to 45 mph, tractors generally move slower than traffic

### Safety guidelines for tractors on roadways

- Display the Slow Moving Vehicle (SMV) emblem on all off-road vehicles. Make sure emblems are in good condition and properly mounted
- Use proper vehicle lighting, including flashers anytime you use public roads. The American Society of Agricultural Engineers (ASAE) recommends two flashing amber lights, mounted at least 42 inches high, in both the front and rear
- In addition to flashers, use headlights and taillights a half hour before sunset until a half hour after sunrise, and whenever insufficient light or unfavorable weather conditions exist
- ASAE recommends two headlights on the front at the same level, positioned as far apart as possible, rear left and right red taillights mounted as far apart as possible, and two red reflectors visible from the rear
- Inspect hitches to verify they are sturdy and properly mounted before towing equipment or using wagons. Always use safety chains if equipped
- Be sure the engine has cooled down before fueling your tractor or farm equipment

### Safety first attitude

Developing a “safety first” attitude, following safe work practices and setting good examples for others can help prevent incidents on your farm or ranch.

- Be physically and mentally fit when operating tractors. Fatigue, stress, medication, alcohol or drugs can detract from safe tractor operation
- Read your operator’s manual, and pay special attention to safety information
- Inspect tractors for any hazards and correct them before operating
- Make sure everyone who operates tractors receives training and is physically able to operate it safely
- Shut down equipment, turn off engine, remove key and wait for moving parts to stop before dismounting equipment
- Keep bystanders and others away from tractor operation area. Never allow “extra riders,” especially children

### Always inspect your machine

Just like a pilot checks safety measures on his or her aircraft before every single flight, run through your tractor checklist before you take off:

- Are ROPS in place and seat belts used?
- Is a PTO master shield in place?
- Is the operator’s platform clear of debris?
- Are windows and mirrors clean, and views unobstructed?
- Has any broken or cracked glass been replaced or repaired?
- Is a reflective “Slow Moving Vehicle” emblem posted?
- Are lights and flashers operational?
- Are tires properly inflated?
- Are the hydraulics free from leaks?
- Can brakes be locked together?
- Is a 10 lb. “ABC” fire extinguisher in place?
- Is a fully equipped first aid kit on the tractor?

These measures may take time, but protecting yourself and others will be worth the investment.



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