

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

University Extension

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Road Safety, a Shared Responsibility

AMES, Iowa -- Getting harvest from the field to market can be dangerous work, but doing it in traffic on Iowa's highways and county roads extends the hazards to other drivers and their passengers.

Motor vehicle collision fatalities are well documented with over 42,000 people dying in motor vehicle crashes in 2006. The largest percent (53.7 percent) of fatal crashes nationally are those that happen in rural areas. While farm tractors and other farm equipment comprise a small percent of total motor vehicles nationally, the percentage of fatal motor vehicle collisions involving farm equipment is almost five times higher than other vehicle collisions. In crashes involving farm vehicles, the farm vehicle operator was killed nearly twice as often as an occupant of the other motor vehicle.

The most likely types of collisions are left-turn and rear-end collisions. The left-turn collision happens when the farm vehicle is about to make a wide left turn and the vehicle behind begins to pass. The second most common incident is the rear-end collision, where another vehicle approaches farm equipment and is unable to slow down to avoid a collision. This happens because of large difference in travel speeds of these two types of vehicles.

Charles Schwab, Iowa State University Extension farm safety specialist, says proper lighting and marking for farm vehicles is only half of the solution. Motor vehicle drivers also must heed the signs and be on the lookout for farm traffic, especially in the weeks ahead.

Higher speeds used on rural roads, changeable conditions and a variety of traffic all contribute to these injuries. In Iowa, motorists also must be aware of farm traffic, which can be difficult to spot, plus it travels at much slower speeds than normal traffic, Schwab adds.

"Motorists may be unfamiliar with the outlines of farm equipment, especially at dusk when operators are returning from fields or moving between fields. Unfamiliarity can cause a split-second delay in reaction that, in many cases, can lead to a collision," he says.

Schwab offers these defensive-driving tips for rural roads this fall:

- As soon as you see a slow-moving vehicle (SMV) emblem, brake as if you were approaching a stop sign.
- Look for hand or turn signals from the farm vehicle operator, indicating a left-turn.
- When passing, make sure you can see the farm vehicle in your rearview mirror before you get back in your lane.

Road safety is a shared responsibility so make sure your part this fall.

Sept. 21-27 marks the 65th observance of National Farm Safety and Health Week by the National Safety Council and other safety organizations throughout the country.

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