

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

University Extension

9/2/04

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Hitch and Go Safely This Harvest Season

AMES, Iowa – Each harvest season some loaded wagons go into the ditch due to an inability of the towing vehicle and braking system to control the load.

There are a number of reasons that these loads go out of control, according to Mark Hanna and Chuck Schwab, ISU Extension agricultural engineers.

“First, some drivers who offer to help reduce the harvest rush are not experienced with towing loads,” said Hanna.

Another contributing factor is that the number of choices and sizes of farm equipment has increased dramatically over the past several years, making it a challenge to match the right towing equipment with the right wagon.

Pick up trucks have become a popular choice to pull grains wagons and are often used to tow loads that are too big. “One of the reasons people like to use trucks instead of tractors is to return wagons faster to the field,” said Hanna. “But they need to stop and think about whether the truck can control the loaded wagon and be able to stop adequately.”

Schwab said one hazard when using trucks is the brake capacity is not suitable for heavy loads. “Even when the brakes are applied, the vehicle will still be moving forward because it is overloaded, especially when going down a hill,” he said.

The two men offer these tips for matching the right towing equipment with the right load.

When towing grain wagons without brakes drivers should:

Not exceed 20 miles per hour travel speed.

Not tow loaded wagons weighing more 1.5 times the weight of the towing vehicle.

When towing grain wagons with brakes drivers should:

Not exceed 25 miles per hour travel speed, unless specifically allowed by the equipment.

Not tow loaded wagons weighing more than 4.5 times the weight of the towing vehicle.

No matter what type of towing vehicle and load is being moved, do not exceed the maximum capacity of the towing vehicle or weight ratings on the roads being traveled.

Also make sure to check that:

Tires are properly inflated.

All required markings and lighting are affixed and working.

The wagon is properly attached and securely hitched.

The operator has the skill and experience to transport the grain.

For more information on farm safety visit: <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/ag/farmsafe.html>