



CLIPPINGS a weekly column from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach

Week of October 7, 2019

For Immediate Release

Safe Rural Roads During Harvest

Joel DeJong, Field Agronomist

I believe most recognize that 2019 has been a challenging year for crop producers in Northwest Iowa. The stress continues during this harvest season, which we seem to be starting about three weeks later than normal. Starting harvest late, along with that nagging fear of winter weather soon settling in on the region will encourage crop producers to extend the day length of harvest as much as they can when field conditions allow. That means there will be slow-moving large equipment on rural Iowa roads, and likely some of them after dark. Situations like this seem to cause accidents in Northwest Iowa each year. No reason exists to put your life, or the life of others, in danger when slow and fast traffic are interacting.

There are many potential hazards out there that deserve increased vigilance. Hilly roads can make it difficult to see very far into the distance, and many have narrow shoulders. At times, some mud has been dragged onto roads when wagons or trucks leave the field, causing slicker conditions. Large farm implements may cross the middle of the road, and the drivers often don't want to get too near the road edge where their heavy weight could cause rollover risk.

For the cars, SUVs and pickups travelling the road, remember it is difficult to react when coming upon slower equipment. The smaller size of your auto makes it harder for equipment operators to see you. It is hard but slowing down and being patient is extremely critical during this time of year. Never pass farm equipment while in no-passing zones. When passing slower large equipment use your turn signals to let the equipment driver know you are passing. In addition, do not forget that sometimes this equipment will be turning into field driveways – not just onto another road.

Some tips for farmers operating machinery would include being certain 'Slow Moving Vehicle' (SMV) emblems are bright and clean, all equipment is well lit with frequent checks to ensure the lighting is working and use signal lights before making any turns – especially when pulling right to make a wide left-hand turn. Use mirrors to monitor the surroundings and try to travel on less busy roads. Dusk and dawn travel avoidance is encouraged because visibility is reduced, so if possible, move equipment when it is light outside. Maybe consider having a pilot car escort you from field to field especially when equipment is wide or high.

I hate hearing about ag-related accidents, but I do much more often than I like. Stress on farmers and travelers reduces our decision-making skills, which could put us all at risk. Plan on longer times to get to your destination and be PATIENT while traveling there.

Joel DeJong, Field Agronomist
Iowa State University Extension and Outreach
712-546-7835 or jldejong@iastate.edu