



Illinois Department of Labor Stresses Farm Vehicle Safety as Busy Harvest Season Begins

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SPRINGFIELD – The agricultural industry is one of the most dangerous with a work-related death rate of 23 deaths per 100,000 workers, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. And the fall harvest season is one of the busiest and most dangerous times for agricultural workers.

Recognizing the dangers of harvest season, the National Safety Council each year designates the third week of September as National Farm Safety and Health Week --

September 20-26 -- which this year emphasizes the need for farm vehicle and rural road safety. This year's theme is "Every Farmer Counts."

"September is tractor season in Illinois," said Michael Kleinik, director of the Illinois Department of Labor. "This is the time of year when it is so important for both farmers and motorists to be patient and share the roads. We want everyone to head home to their families safe and sound at the end of each day."

Vehicle safety is an especially important focus this time of year. Tractor overturns are the leading cause of fatalities in the agriculture industry, according to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. These accidents result in about 130 deaths each year nationwide, according to the National Ag Safety Database.

While tractor roll-over accidents most often occur on the farm, roadways also pose a major safety hazard. Too often a non-farm vehicle attempting to pass causes a collision before the tractor or farm implement can finish a left-hand turn onto a rural road or into a field. Many collisions occur simply because the driver fails to reduce speed for the slower moving farm implement.

"We all appreciate the important work our farmers do, and this time of year it is vital that we support and protect them by slowing down when you approach farm vehicles on rural roads," said Kleinik.

Visibility is also a key to safety on the roads. All agricultural vehicles using the public roadways must display the fluorescent orange Slow Moving Vehicle triangle. Additionally, tractors and other self-powered farm vehicles must have proper lighting. According to Illinois law:

- Lighting is required from 30 minutes before sunset to 30 minutes after sunrise.
- There should be two white lamps on the front of the vehicle, visible from at least 1000 feet to the front of the vehicle.
- There should be two red lamps on the rear of the vehicle, visible from at least 1000 feet to the rear of the vehicle.
- There should be at least one flashing amber signal lamp on the rear of the vehicle, mounted as high as possible and visible from at least 500 feet, which can be used during daylight as well.

Drivers should remember that farm vehicle operators have limited visibility to the rear. Anyone passing such a vehicle needs to use extreme caution.

Modern farm equipment provides effective safety devices if they are used properly. Death and serious injury from tractor roll overs can be prevented by roll-over protective structures – a roll bar or cage designed to provide a safe space around the driver.

But too often workers fail to use a vital part of this safety device – a safety belt. Unless the operator is buckled in, the roll-over protection cannot do its job and an injury or fatality can still occur.

Another key to harvest-time safety is being healthy and alert. The temptation during harvest season is to keep pushing until the work is done. But that can be a recipe for disaster. Safety experts stress three words for agricultural workers to stay safe during the busy harvest days – Rest. Nutrition. Hydration.

Take regular breaks to stretch your legs – these breaks can serve the dual purpose of taking time to make a quick inspection of your tractor or combine. Also, your tractor isn't the only thing that needs fuel. Make sure to eat and drink fluids regularly to help stay alert.

The National Education Center for Agricultural Safety will offer free safety webinars each day of the week of September 20-26. You can find more information and register for the webinars --topics include farm vehicle safety, respiratory protection, farmer mental health, child agriculture safety and more – at <https://www.necasag.org/nationalfarmsafetyandhealthweek/>