

Views from VanDeWalle

Brandy VanDeWalle, Extension Educator in Fillmore/Clay Counties

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Harvest Safety

It is hard to believe that harvest is starting and just as a reminder that with harvest comes more traffic on the county roads and other stresses for farmers. It never fails, that equipment can break, there can be delays at the elevator and those extra-long hours can all add extra stress to farmers. That being said, it is important to carefully slow down and realize the many hazards you are being exposed to during harvest.

An Iowa State Extension publication, Harvest Safety Yields Big Dividends points out that injuries can occur by taking shortcuts to perform routine tasks, not getting enough sleep or regular breaks, or failing to follow safety practices. Some injuries occur when operators are pulled into the intake area of harvesting machines, such as balers, combines, or corn pickers, and many injuries occur from slips or falls around these machines. Exposure to powerful machinery is highest during the harvest season. The equipment must be powerful to effectively handle large amounts of agricultural commodities. When equipment plugs, NEVER try to unplug it with live equipment, instead always disengage power and turn off the engine before trying to manually clear a plugged machine. Regular maintenance of these machines can also make harvest go smoother. Also, lots of accidents actually happen by the operator slipping and falling off equipment.

In the same publication listed above, there are several tips for reducing fall hazards:

- Always keep all platforms free of tools or other objects.
- Frequently clean the steps and other areas where workers stand to service, mount and dismount, or operate the machine.
- Wear well-fitting, comfortable shoes with non-slip soles.
- Use grab bars when mounting or dismounting machinery.
- Be sure your position is stable before you work on a machine.
- Recognize that fatigue, stress, drugs or alcohol, and age may affect stability.

Other helpful tips during harvest are to keep kids away from machinery. Tell them the dangers that can occur and not to play near the equipment, even when it is shut off; you never know when they will be playing in hidden areas of the equipment. Operators should double check where kids are before moving the equipment. Too many accidents can occur when youth are in the path of equipment out of the operator's view. Operators of all equipment should check in regularly and let someone know where you are. Keep all guards on equipment; it is there for a reason!

It is also important for the public to understand the increased traffic on public roads and be patient. The greatest threat raised between farm equipment and passenger vehicles is the difference in speed. Farm equipment runs at an average speed of 20 miles per hour while passenger vehicles average 60 miles per hour. If the motor vehicle overtakes a tractor, the impact is comparable to a passenger vehicle hitting a brick wall at 40 miles per hour. If the tractor and a car, mini-van or pickup collides head on, the impact is the same as hitting a brick wall at 60 miles per hour.

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Farmers can reduce the chances of an accident by using warning lights, reflectors and reflective tape on their machinery to keep passenger vehicle operators aware of their presence on roads. Some farmers may choose to install supplemental lights to increase visibility. It also is a good idea for producers to keep off heavily traveled roads as much as possible and avoid moving equipment during the busiest part of the day.

Some farm equipment, such as combines, can take up more than half of the road. Even so, it is up to both drivers to be aware of their own limitations and adjust accordingly. Farmers should not take up more space than is needed, but other drivers should try to provide as much room as possible. It is a good idea for passenger vehicles to turn off onto side or field roads until larger machinery has passed. Whenever possible, farmers should use an escort vehicle such as a pickup to precede or follow large machinery and equipment on public roads. More than one escort may be necessary. Ideally, the escort vehicle would have extra warning lights and a sign indicating oversized or slow equipment ahead or following.

Have a safe harvest!