



Views from VanDeWalle

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National Farm Safety Week

It is no coincidence that National Farm Safety and Health week falls in September. September marks a busy time for farmers as harvest begins. The busier we get, the increased chance for accidents to occur happens. This week, I've decided to share tips for farmers to keep safe this harvest season.

According to the National Education Center for Agricultural Safety, the theme for National Farm Safety and Health Week 2021 is "Farm Safety Yields Results". The 2019 data for the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates that the agricultural sector is still the most dangerous in America with 573 fatalities, or an equivalent of 23.1 deaths per 100,000 workers. Fall harvest time can be one of the busiest and most dangerous seasons of the year for the agriculture industry. For this reason, the third week of September has been recognized as National Farm Safety and Health Week. This annual promotion initiated by the National Safety Council has been proclaimed as such by each sitting U.S. President since Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1944. National Farm Safety and Health Week is led by the National Education Center for Agricultural Safety (NECAS), the agricultural partner of the National Safety Council.

Daily topics of focus this year include:

- Monday, September 20th – Tractor Safety & Rural Roadway Safety
- Tuesday, September 21st – Overall Farmer Health
- Wednesday, September 22nd - Safety & Health for Youth in Agriculture
- Thursday, September 23rd - Agricultural Fertilizer & Chemical Safety
- Friday, September 24th - Safety & Health for Women in Agriculture

Nebraska is fortunate to have the University of Nebraska Medical Center, College of Public Health. UNMC works with the Central States Center for Agricultural Safety and Health and Risto Rautiainen, PhD provides the following farm machinery hazard reminders:

- Protect grain augers to prevent cuts and laceration injuries.
- Protect Power Take-Off shafts with guards to avoid entanglements.
- Old tractors can have poor steps; if possible, purchase improved steps to prevent slips and falls.
- Old tractors have poor seats which lead to muscle and joint pain. Replace them to protect your muscles and joints.
- Use good lighting and marking to increase visibility on the road.
- Use protected ladders or (preferably) stairways with guardrails in grain bins to reduce falls.
- Do not enter a bin when the sweep auger is running.
- Oil leaks from worn hydraulic lines can penetrate the skin and enter the blood stream.
- Sharing the road with all types of traffic can be a challenge, so be aware of your surroundings.
- Safety around powerlines should always be front of mind when operating large farm equipment.

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Other tips from UNMC, include wearing N95 masks to protect your lungs from dust and wear hearing protection to protect your lungs. Keep fire extinguishers maintained and easily accessible. Talk to your children or children who plan to visit the farm and make sure they are aware of the hazards of large equipment. Do not enter the grain bin alone and communicate with others where you are located.

One thing often not thought about is how stress and fatigue can cause accidents. One strategy to prevent clouded thinking is to take time between each task to THINK! Take 5 deep breathes before moving on; this helps your brain function better. During this unique time of uncertainty with low commodity prices, weather-related challenges and in a pandemic, you are an essential work, not only to feed the country but most importantly to your family and friends. Be sure to take care of yourself this harvest season. Get plenty of sleep, eat healthy meals and utilize your network of family and friends and ask for help if needed.

For more tips on farm safety, go to UNMC's website at <https://unmc.edu/publichealth/cscash> or The National Education Center for Agricultural Safety's site at <https://www.necasag.org/>. Wishing you all a very successful and safe harvest!