

## REMEMBER FARM SAFETY

September 18<sup>th</sup> through September 24<sup>th</sup> will be National Farm Safety and Health Week. It is important to acknowledge, celebrate, and uplift America's farmers and ranchers who have encountered many challenges over the past few years, yet continue to work hard to provide the food, fiber, and fuel that we need. Fall harvest time can be one of the busiest and most dangerous seasons of the year for the agriculture industry. With fall harvest beginning, safety needs to be an important focus for farmers and others in our rural community.

Each year in Nebraska and other states there have been tragic farm accidents. It reminds us of the importance of farm safety and how dangerous farming can be. Agriculture is one of the most dangerous industries in the United States. 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. Approximately 100 children and youth die in farm work accidents annually in the United States. In the spring of 2010 there were five farm fatalities in Nebraska in a matter of a few weeks. In 2017 there were four farm fatalities in Nebraska, with 3 men fatally injured in different farm accidents. A young adult was killed in a loader accident, another man became tangled up equipment while feeding livestock, and another died when he was working on equipment and it fell on him and crushed him. It is extremely important to be aware of farm hazards to prevent potential farm accidents and even fatalities on the farm. In 2019, there were at least 5 farm-related fatalities, with three in southeast Nebraska. These accidents involved working with grain, being pinned between a tractor and equipment and a tractor being hit by a semi-truck. In 2020 a farmer was killed in Saunders County in a tractor overturn accident. A young man was killed in Custer County when a piece of equipment that he was working on fell on him, crushing his chest. Corn grain and soybean harvest will start in earnest soon here in southeast Nebraska. It is very important for all of us to remember safety during this busy time of the year. It is important for farmers and travelers alike to be aware of the dangers of harvest equipment being transported on the highways and country roads.

The days are getting shorter, so sometimes it is very difficult to see, especially around dusk or dawn when the sun sometimes blinds you as you drive toward it. Country roads can be dusty, making driving particularly hazardous when harvest equipment is moving from field to field. In 2019, a driver was killed on I-80 near York, NE in a multicar pile-up due to the blowing dust off a field. A semi-truck driver was also killed near Schuyler when he tried to pass a tractor pulling a feed wagon and he ran off the road into a creek. These situations call for cautious driving for the traveler, but it is important for farmers to have the proper SMV (Slow Moving Vehicle) signs on their equipment as well. It is also important that farm tractors and combines have functioning hazard-warning lights. Operating headlights and hazard-warning lights provide advance warning for other drivers on highways and country roads. We must not forget about train track crossings as well. Earlier this month a Litchfield, NE farmer was killed in Sherman County when his tractor was hit by a train as he was crossing the tracks.

Safety at the farmstead and in the field must not be overlooked either. Equipment, tractor, and truck operators must always be aware of other people in the area, particularly young children and elderly people. When entering the farmyard, especially at night, be alert to pedestrians. If you are starting up and will be moving equipment, check to make sure everything is clear and there

isn't anyone playing or looking around the equipment. Many times young children may be playing in and around equipment and are difficult to see. Sometimes people may be looking at equipment and they do not hear it being started up and may end up in the way and at risk of getting injured. The most common accidents that occur in handling grain involve suffocation, falls, entanglement, and electrocution. In 2018 there were two fatalities reported in grain bin accidents in Nebraska. Another farmer was electrocuted on the farm in 2019. There was also a fatality from a utility vehicle accident in Nebraska. Always protect yourself, use caution, and practice safety first!

Finally, safety in the field must not be overlooked. While you may be very careful when you're on the road or at the farmstead when other people are involved, **don't forget safety in the field**. During harvest there is pressure to get the crop harvested as soon as possible. The past couple of years we have faced some challenging harvest conditions, with the weather. We must not ignore safety when we're harvesting the crop. **Always** be sure to follow all safety guidelines listed in the manufacturer's operator manual and **always** have shields in place, and support equipment properly when working under it. Never try to unplug a combine when it is running. There have been too many people that have lost a limb or have died trying to do this. Here is a link to the website: <http://www.necasag.org/nationalfarmsafetyandhealthweek/> . This website has some excellent resources that address farm and agricultural safety issues. The bottom line is **“JUST BE CAREFUL!”**

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