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HARVEST SEASON ACCIDENTS NECESSITATE SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

From now to October marks the most dangerous period of the year for farmers and everyone that travels rural highways and county roads. Line of site with many of our county road intersections is a trouble point. Accidents occur at unmarked and marked county road intersections. Vehicles when hitting loose gravel can sway off the road or worse yet roll over. A driver gets distracted for an instant with a cell phone message, leading to an accident. Being able to see ATV's (even with the taller flags) can be a challenge with the tall corn at county road intersections. An inexperienced driver on a school permit hits the brakes and misses his turn on a gravel road going to school. It all adds up to accidents waiting to happen, unless we think safety first.

Since 1972, farming accidents have resulted in more than 570 fatalities during the months of July through October. These accidents include tractor overturns, people getting thrown off ATVs, slipping and falling off combines, getting underneath headers and getting crushed, getting caught in picker heads and grain heads, suffocating in grain and so on.

Farmers need to do pre-harvest service on their equipment to ensure that everything runs smoothly during harvest time. They need to secure and clean steps and handles for getting on and off equipment. They also need to clean the cab glass and check that equipment lights are working, so they can see clearly. Conducting pre-harvest checks helps prevent breakdowns that add stress to an already busy harvest season.

Machinery doesn't grow tired, but people do. Farmers need to ensure they themselves are well rested and alert to operate the machinery. Most fatalities occur after 3 p.m. because operators will get tired after being in the field for eight or nine hours.

To keep yourself alert, eat right and take frequent breaks. Taking a break could mean stopping to check the machine, clean the chaff off, clean the cab glass – anything that gets the blood flowing. It is important to take prescribed medication at the appropriate time, so concentration and response isn't affected.

After grain is harvested, farmers need to unload it carefully because of the suffocation risk in grain bins and grain carts. People can be swept into the grain flow when it's unloading and suffocate under the grain. Make sure everyone is clear of the bins or carts when unloading grain and keep children under close adult supervision.

After dark is also a dangerous time to be operating machinery. ATVs are almost tied with tractor overturns as the leading cause of farm fatalities in Nebraska in the last 16 years. It's easy to get thrown off an ATV when it's dark and people can't see you and when you can't see the ground. Those working in the fields should drive carefully and have their headlights on.

Taking some time to implement these safety tips is a worthwhile investment to help reduce the number of accidents and keeps our 2011 harvest going smoothly.

GOOD YEAR TO PLANT OAK TREES

Our native Bur Oaks this year are loaded and it makes you think about the future. It may be a little early yet to collect Bur Oak acorns but the suggestion is to wait until they start falling naturally and then collect them from the ground.



The standard recommendation for planting nuts is twice as deep as diameter of the nut, which would be about 2 inches for Bur Oak. UNL Forester Dennis Adams suggests planting them a little deeper, maybe 3-4 inches to possibly help with squirrel pilferage.

The problem with planting seed is that you can never be sure about the seed viability with the drying or maggots, etc. Therefore, discard the acorns with holes already in them and also plant 3-5 per hole. They can always be thinned to one stem later. Bur Oak is in the White Oak group so they cannot be stored very easily. Bur Oak plantings from acorns should be planted this fall after they drop. Animal control will probably be the worst problem, with squirrels, mice, rabbits, deer, and cattle so plant enough to compensate.

But for those of you trying to improve an edge of a CRP or area with a pond or start a new tree line for the future, this is a good year to do it with a bountiful harvest out there.

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