

Rural Roadway Safety

Blue skies and tranquil settings may lull us into complacency when driving on rural roadways but a tragedy may be waiting to happen just around the corner. Rural roadways can be danger zones for both farm machinery operators and those sharing the road if both are not careful. When comparing the number of fatalities on rural roadways and those using the primary or interstate roads, the rural traveler is less likely to buckle up and more likely to be killed. A report done by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) indicated that there are approximately 40% more fatal crashes and fatalities occurring in rural areas compared to urban areas. Rural fatal crashes, have a larger proportion of crashes with: more than one fatality per crash, a truck involved, severe vehicle damage, a head-on collision, and ejected persons.

Factors Unique to the Rural Setting

Factors unique to rural roads such as large slow moving machinery, soft shoulders, hills, people riding in the back of pick-ups, and inexperienced vehicle operators could result in a dangerous situation. Large machinery's size, weight, and power magnify the destruction that can take place if a collision should occur. When a motorist comes upon a slow moving vehicle the driver may not be able to slow down fast enough to prevent a collision, especially if coming upon the machinery from a hill or around a curve where the driver's vision is impeded.

Youth under driver license requirement age may legally operate tractors and farm machinery on public roads if they are conducting farm operations. These youth may not have the skills and experience of older drivers.

Pickup trucks are a major form of transportation in rural settings and much concern has been expressed about the safety of occupants in these vehicles. The cargo area of a pickup truck has proven to be a source of numerous injuries and deaths of children and adults. According to the

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, states that over two hundred people are killed per year while riding in pickup truck cargo beds. More than half the deaths are children and teenagers. Many states have no laws restricting passengers from riding in the back of pickup trucks.



Listed below are ideas for machinery and vehicle operators to prevent rural roadway tragedies from becoming gruesome statistics:

Farm machinery operators

- Train novice farm machinery drivers in safe operation.
- Be a role model when operating farm machinery and vehicles on the roadways.
- Make sure all SMV emblems and reflective markings are bright and clean.
- Farm equipment should be properly lighted, including turn signals, headlights, flashing amber, and taillights.
- Equip all tractors with rollover protective structures (ROPS) and instruct all operators to wear seat belts.
- Be sure brakes and steering are in good working condition.

Those that share the rural roadways with the farm machinery operators

- Always wear your seatbelt and insist all passengers in the vehicle do the same.
- Drive cautiously and within the speed limit when on rural roadways.
- Exercise patience when traveling behind a slow moving vehicle and watch for driveways where the vehicle may unexpectedly turn.
- Pass slow moving vehicles only when certain that the roadway is clear of approaching traffic, enough clearance exists on the roadway, and the operator of the slow moving vehicle is aware you are passing.
- Teach young drivers skills of driving defensively and safely.
- Never allow passengers to ride in the cargo area of a pickup.

