

New survey of farm and rural youth shows many ignore safety guidelines

By Cheryl Tevis, Farm Issues Editor

Survey sets off ATV alarm



Photographs: Laurie Potter, Ron Van Zee

Waco Phipps, 19, Kearney, Nebraska, demonstrates proper personal protective equipment for ATVs. He took his first ATV training, along with his mom, when he was 12 years old.

Waco Phipps often volunteers to talk to kids about ATV safety. But the 19-year-old former Farm Safety 4 Just Kids (FS4JK) youth delegate is finding out that it's a big job to walk the talk.

Last April, Waco and his brother, Warner, were riding ATVs on their farm near Kearney, Nebraska. When Warner got stuck, Waco gave his ATV a push. But when Waco revved it to full throttle, Warner's ATV shifted, causing Waco's machine to flip over. He was pinned underneath.

"It all happened so quickly, there was nothing I could do," Waco says.

Waco, who was wearing a helmet, gloves, jeans, and boots, fractured three lumbar vertebrae. He wore a back brace for about three months.

"When I saw a specialist, I found out five others were hurt on ATVs at about that same time," Waco says. "One was a neighbor. Two others were my age."

It's increasingly common. From

1997 to 2001, the number of ATVs in the U.S. rose by 40%. The estimated number of ATV-related injuries at emergency rooms more than doubled during the same period.

"Recent trends show a rapid increase in ATV use and subsequent injuries to youth ATV users," says Shari Burgus, FS4JK education director, Earlham, Iowa. "This is especially true for riders with less than one year of experience."

STATISTICS ARE ALARMING

Burgus and researchers at Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health, Iowa City, Iowa, are alarmed by statistics. One third of all ATV-related fatalities from 1982 to 2002 were youth under 16 years.

"We wanted to learn more about kids' knowledge, training, behaviors, injuries, and risk factors regarding ATVs," Burgus says.

They surveyed 624 youth from 43 states, ages 12 to 20, at the National FFA Convention in Louisville. Two thirds of members live on a farm.

On average, the participants begin riding ATVs at age 9½. Of those surveyed, 26% say they never wear a helmet. Other risky behaviors include riding on paved surfaces and riding adult-size ATVs.

Of the boys who responded, 37% have been hurt in an ATV incident, compared to 20% of girls. But more girls say they allow riders.

Burgus says she doesn't know how this data compares to other rural youth and their ATV use.

The FFA study shows kids often run larger ATVs than recommended. Half operate ATVs above 350 cc.

The ATV Safety Institute offers the following engine size guidelines:

- Ages 12 and older – 70 cc to 90 cc
- Ages 16 and older – over 90 cc

"It's a concern that over 50% of kids younger than 16 years report



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▶▶ riding ATVs greater than 90 cc,” Burgus says. Of these minors, 31% report an ATV incident.

“Those riding ATVs larger than 90 cc have twice the injury risk compared to those on smaller ATVs,” she says.

Waco Phipps, who presents ATV safety workshops at the National FFA Convention, reinforces these survey findings. He stresses the need to match ATV size to the operator.

“Find one that fits you,” he tells them. “Look at the length of your arms and legs. Can you turn the wheels and still sit back in the seat?”



Staci Bruder, 22, Prairie Farm, Wisconsin, has been involved in ATV safety efforts through FFA and Farm Safety 4 Just Kids. She says there’s a need to offer more ATV operator safety courses to help teen riders gain more experience.

USING A HELMET REQUIRES YOUR HEAD

Helmet use also is critical. FFA youth give two common reasons for not wearing helmets:

- 35% don’t think one is needed
- 20% don’t have a helmet that fits

ATVs also aren’t designed to carry passengers safely. Yet 14% say they always allow passengers, 17% say most of the time, and 57% say sometimes. Only 12% say never.

“The study indicates it’s common for other youth to ride along,” Burgus says. “Only a small portion of young ATV users always ride solo. But 41% of youth who allow riders say they worry about them.”

ATVs aren’t intended for paved roads. Yet most report riding on paved surfaces sometimes. Only 19% say they never ride on paving.

“Our results are similar to other previous findings,” Burgus says. “We find that youth riding paved surfaces are more likely to be injured.”

Staci Bruder, 22, isn’t surprised by the survey results. The former

FFA member and FS4JK youth ambassador now is a college senior. She also raises cattle near Prairie Farm, Wisconsin.

“We have a trail behind our farm. We see kids riding as passengers with other kids and younger kids riding behind adults,” she says. “Most don’t wear helmets. Parents underestimate

the power of ATVs and the capacity of kids to know what to do if something goes wrong.”

Experts advise more training. Only 22% of FFA youth have had any safety training. “Two fifths say they’d like training,” Burgus says.

States such as North Carolina have passed stronger laws. The American Academy of Pediatrics has asked the Consumer Product Safety Commission to address injury and death rates. The Academy advocates these measures:

- Banning kids under 16 as drivers
- Requiring a driver’s license
- Prohibiting alcohol use
- Banning ATVs on paved roads
- Requiring protective gear
- Prohibiting passengers
- Allowing only daylight use
- Mandating seat belts and roll bars

These changes may be years away. In the meantime, Waco Phipps is using a \$5,000 grant to build an ATV rollover demonstration. He urges ATV dealers to push training. Most of all, he wants adults to walk the talk. “Parents can help by following safety rules and enforcing helmet use,” he says. ■

SURVEY OF HELMET USE

ATV helmet use among FFA members at the 2005 National Convention:

- 23.8% report they always wear an ATV helmet.
- 19.5% report they wear an ATV helmet most of the time.
- 31.1% report they sometimes wear an ATV helmet.
- 25.6% report they never wear an ATV helmet. ■

+ learn more

New ATV educational packet, *Ride Smart*, is available from Farm Safety 4 Just Kids, P.O. Box 458, Earlham, IA 50072 800/423-5437 | www.fs4jk.org