

Agricultural Equipment on the Road – How to Avoid Collisions

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One of the more hazardous things that farmers do is traveling over the road with tractors and equipment. NYCAMH works with many different farms in the state of New York and the Northeast, and roadway travel is a problem that many of these producers have recognized as being their most significant safety issue. Farm equipment is becoming wider and longer. Farm size is increasing and so is the amount of time spent traveling on roadways from field to field. Something that farmers can do to help make their roadway travel safer is to make sure that all agricultural machinery that travels over the road is properly lighted and marked.

Farm equipment usually moves 25 miles per hour (mph) or less in areas where the speed limit may be posted at 55 mph. A motorist going at 55 mph on the highway approaching farm equipment at 15 mph can be on the equipment's "back door" in less than 7 seconds (while traveling 400 feet). This does not give the motorist much time to react. According to the National Safety Council – roadway collisions that involve farm vehicles on US roads total more than 15,000 per year. More than 2/3 of these collisions involve the farm vehicle being hit from behind, but collisions can also occur during left turns or by sideswipes. Over 90% of these collisions occur in the daylight and on dry roads. Usually, when the fatality occurs, the victim is the tractor operator.

How do you stay visible and safe during road travel with farm equipment?

- Use reflective strips to show the size of farm equipment.
- Use flashers and turn signals indicate your location and intentions.
- SMV (Slow Moving Vehicle) Emblem: All implements of husbandry designed to operate at 25 mph or less must display the SMV at all times on highways. It should be in the center of the rear of the machine, 2 to 6 feet above the ground. The SMV emblem needs to be kept clean and should be replaced when faded.
- Each piece of agricultural equipment, whether self propelled or used in combination, shall separately display a slow-moving vehicle emblem.
- It is illegal to use SMV emblems as driveway or mailbox markers. This misuse confuses the meaning of the SMV emblem, which leads to its loss of effectiveness as a warning device.
- Replace an SMV emblem that becomes dirty, broken or faded; it is ineffective and illegal. New SMV emblems can be reflective up to 1200 feet.
- Check your SMV emblem, marking tape and lights before road travel.
- Consider an escort vehicle if moving large equipment on the road.
- Pull over, when safe, to allow motorists to pass.

How do you stay safe as a motorist when you encounter farm machinery on roadways?

- Be alert for agricultural equipment with SMV emblems, reflectors, or flashing lights.
- Avoid a collision by slowing down immediately when you see agricultural equipment on the road with SMV emblems. SMV emblems are meant to warn you to slow down.
- Be careful when trying to pass equipment as the operator may not see or hear you
- Pass with caution, as the equipment may be longer and wider than you think.

- Be aware of possible left-sided turns into fields.

Many farmers have told us, whenever possible, they try not to operate over the roadways after dark or when visibility is poor. After dark or in times of poor visibility, roadway travel becomes much more hazardous for slow moving tractors and equipment. If your farm has fields along busy roadways, determine if it would be possible to put service roads in your fields. In some cases, field service roads could eliminate the need for operating your equipment on the public roadway.

NYCAMH continues to offer on-farm safety surveys and worker safety trainings at no cost to farm owners. We offer bilingual trainings and materials for Spanish speaking workers. If you want more information on these services, or information on roadway safety, please contact me at 800-343-7527, ext 239 or e-mail me at jcarrabba@nycamh.com. NYCAMH, a program of Bassett Healthcare Network, is enhancing agricultural and rural health by preventing and treating occupational injury and illness.