

Farm Truck Safety Tips

By Jim Carrabba

Trucks are an important part of many farms here in the northeast. Farm trucks are becoming more numerous as farms become larger and have acreage spread out over more area. With summer beginning, now is a good time to review some basics of farm truck safety. Fatal injuries involving farm trucks have occurred from overturns, being crushed under raised beds, raised beds contacting power lines, backing over bystanders, roadway collisions, overloading trucks, and loads that shift weight.

Train and practice: One of the most important ways to prevent these tragedies is to make sure that all drivers are familiar with the truck and how to operate it before using it. New drivers need to be thoroughly trained, and have time to practice driving before the busy harvesting and hauling times begin.

Check truck each day: Prior to the beginning of each workday, make sure that the truck is safe to operate. Drivers must complete a thorough pre-trip inspection of the truck. Make sure that all turn signals, lights and brakes are working properly. During your pre-trip inspection, check the condition of the tires. Check to see that all tires are properly inflated, and are free of cuts, bulges, or other defects. Be sure to check the condition of inside duals. Check to see that there are no rocks or other objects wedged between dual tires. Front tires need at least 4/32 inch tread depth present and all other tires need at least 2/32 inch tread depth.

Give yourself space: Trucks need a lot more distance than other vehicles to stop, steer, or to switch lanes. When following other vehicles, use a four second rule count to maintain a safe following distance. Drivers should take periodic safety breaks. Climb down out of the truck and stretch or walk around the truck if you start to get drowsy during long periods behind the wheel.

Know what you can't see: Be aware of what is around and behind your truck at all times. Keep in mind the blind spots in your mirrors, especially when turning or changing lanes. Sound your horn before backing. Whenever it is possible, use a spotter in congested areas. Keep children out of truck operating areas.

Don't overload: Overloaded trucks are especially dangerous because: stopping distances are greater, steering is more difficult, the truck has less stability, blowouts are more likely, and suspension or axle failures can occur. Additionally, overloaded trucks are more likely to cause damage to roads and bridges. The Gross Vehicle Weight Ratings (GVWR) are usually stamped on a data plate located on the driver's side doorpost. This rating will tell you how heavy a load you can haul with that truck. Be familiar with the characteristics of certain loads; livestock may shift when going around turns; liquids will slosh back and forth, especially if the tank has no interior baffles. When hauling equipment or materials on a truck or trailer bed, make sure it is properly secured so it will

not fall off. Check the height of the load to see that it will not contact tree branches or power lines.

Check stability when dumping: When raising a dump body, always dump on level ground. As you raise the dump body the center of gravity of the truck or trailer bed will rise making it less stable. The longer your truck or trailer bed is, the greater the hazard of overturn if your truck is not completely level. Sometimes a lean to one side can be created by a set of tires in a hole, low tire pressure on one side or an unevenly centered load that is dumped while on soft ground. Some other factors that can affect stability while dumping include, wind, portions of the load that stick or freeze in the bed, and having the trailer in a jack-knifed position while dumping. To prevent crushing incidents, always physically block a raised bed to prevent it from falling onto a person who has placed themselves between a raised bed or truck frame in order to do repairs or service work. Always use the lift arm support if the truck has one.

Raised truck beds: When raising the bed, check to make sure it will not contact overhead wires. People have been electrocuted when raised beds have contacted power lines. If you are driving a vehicle which contacts power lines, don't get out of the vehicle. You will be electrocuted when you get out of the vehicle and make contact with both the ground and the truck. Also, to prevent hitting power lines, do not drive away with your truck bed in a raised position. Lower the bed immediately after dumping the load. This can also help prevent twisting the hoist which can sometimes occur when driving a truck with the bed raised over rough ground.

We at NYCAMH sincerely hope that you have a safe and productive season this year. If you need further information on truck safety, please give us a call. If you would like to schedule a farm safety survey or on-farm safety training session, 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.