



NEWS

JB Pritzker, Governor

Michael D. Kleinik, Director

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Contact:

Mike Matulis 217-785-1719

Michael.Matulis@illinois.gov

Hectic Harvest Can Be A Dangerous Time

Illinois Department of Labor Urges Farmers to Make Safety a Top Concern

SPRINGFIELD – Harvest season is always hectic, but late spring planting this year will mean an especially busy time for farmers over the next few weeks. The Illinois Department of Labor urges farmers not to forsake safety as they race to bring in the 2019 crop.

“Harvest season reminds us how important farmers are to Illinois’ economy and our way of life. But this busy time also brings additional risks to agriculture workers,” said Michael Kleinik, director of the Illinois Department of Labor. “We want farmers to head home to their families safe and sound at the end of each day.”

Vehicle safety is an especially important focus this time of year. Tractor overturns are the leading cause of fatalities in the agriculture industry, according to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. These accidents result in about 130 deaths each year nationwide.

“The roll overs and left-hand turns by farm vehicles on roadways seem to be the top two safety issues,” said Dave Newcomb, Ag Rescue Program Manager with the Illinois Fire Service Institute.

While tractor roll-over accidents most often occur on the farm, roadways also pose a major safety hazard. Too often a vehicle attempting to pass causes a collision before the tractor or farm implement can finish a left-hand turn. Some collisions occur simply because the driver fails to reduce speed for the slower moving farm implement.

Newcomb says impatience and speed are a deadly combination on rural roads this time of year. Sadly, a farm vehicle/car collision this month near Sterling resulted in the death of a 9-year-old girl. The child was a passenger in a vehicle attempting to pass a farm implement. The car struck a grain cart.

“Please, be patient. Please, slow down,” said Newcomb.

Visibility is also a key to safety on the roads. All agricultural vehicles using the public roadways must display the fluorescent orange Slow Moving Vehicle triangle. Additionally, tractors and other self-powered farm vehicles must have proper lighting. According to Illinois law:

- Lighting is required from 30 minutes before sunset to 30 minutes after sunrise.
- There should be two white lamps on the front of the vehicle, visible from at least 1000 feet to the front of the vehicle.
- There should be two red lamps on the rear of the vehicle, visible from at least 1000 feet to the rear of the vehicle.
- There should be at least one flashing amber signal lamp on the rear of the vehicle, mounted as high as possible and visible from at least 500 feet, which can be used during daylight as well.

Drivers should remember that farm vehicle operators have limited visibility to the rear. Anyone passing such a vehicle needs to use extreme caution.

Modern farm equipment provides effective safety devices if they are used properly. Death and serious injury from tractor roll overs can be prevented by roll-over protective structures – a roll bar or cage designed to provide a safe space around the driver.

But too often workers fail to use a vital part of this safety device – a safety belt.

“We have had fatalities where the people were thrown from the tractor and the roll-over protection pinned them to the ground and in one situation actually drowned the person because they were not buckled in,” said Newcomb. “You need to use all of the components.”

Newcomb offers three more words of advice to help avoid making dangerous mistakes this harvest season. Rest. Nutrition. Hydration. He knows of one farm operation this year that has decided to not work on Sundays during harvest to give its employees needed rest.

“And they determined it only added one day to the overall length of harvest,” said Newcomb, noting that it paid other benefits as well. “He told me, ‘We weren’t tired, so we caught little (maintenance) things before they became a real problem.’”

Farmers may not be convinced to take a whole day off during harvest, but at a minimum, Newcomb urges them to take a break every couple of hours – you can use it not only to stretch your legs but to make a quick inspection of your tractor or combine. Also, your tractor isn’t the only thing that needs fuel. Make sure to eat and drink fluids to stay alert.

“It really doesn’t have to be non-stop. Take a few minutes for yourself for safety’s sake,” said Newcomb.