Driving safety tips at harvesttime

In the past few weeks, there have been accidents in rural areas involving motorists and farm equipment. The risk of accidents may increase as daylight hours decrease and the time changes from daylight saving time to standard time.

Motorists need to be prepared for these slow-moving vehicles and to patiently remind themselves that agriculture is a major industry that adds to the economic health and well-being of our community. Farmers will be pressed for time to finish the harvest and to prepare fields for winter.

In some situations, semitrailer grain trucks may be parked on part of the road during harvesttime, particularly on narrow township roads. Be alert for flasher lights and signs while traveling these roads. Farmers will also be on roads at dusk and nighttime hours to get their tasks done.

Vehicle collisions are often the result of differences in speed between slower-moving farm equipment and passenger cars and trucks, or unexpected grain-loading vehicles on the road margins. In many situations a motorist has not allowed enough time to react when he sees farm equipment on the road.

Farmers also need to think about safety and be considerate of other drivers. It is critical that they do their part to be seen on the road. They also need to take extra caution since they are often working long hours in isolated environments and may suffer from fatigue when leaving fields and entering roads.

The agricultural safety team of the Ohio State University Department of Food, Agricultural and Biological Engineering has made a list of safety tips for farmers and non-farmers sharing the roads.

Tips for farmers driving farm equipment:
- Mount a Slow Moving Vehicle (SMV) emblem to the last piece of equipment being hauled. The emblem should be pointed up, placed 2-6 feet above the ground, as near to rear center as possible.
- Stay alert at all times to avoid a serious accident. Do not use the cellphone while operating equipment on public roads.
- Keep a constant lookout for pedestrians, animals, mailboxes, steep ditch embankments, and other roadway obstacles.
- Slow down for sharp curves or when going down a hill.
- Consider using an escort vehicle to follow behind.
- Be cognizant of high traffic times, usually mornings and late afternoons.

Tips for motorists:
- Farm machinery has a legal right to use public roads just as other motor vehicles.
- Farm machinery can unexpectedly turn onto a public road from a field or driveway.
- Farm machinery travels slower than normal traffic, often at speeds of 25 miles per hour or less. Automobile drivers must quickly identify farm equipment and slow down immediately to avoid rear-end crashes.
- Farm machinery operators may not be able to see you because the large equipment or a load can block part of their rear view. If you cannot see the driver, the driver cannot see you.
- Slow-moving farm machinery traveling less than 25 miles per hour should display a Slow Moving Vehicle emblem on the back of the equipment. This is quickly identifiable to other motorists.
- Machinery that is half on the road and half on the shoulder may suddenly move completely onto the road.
- Extra-wide farm machinery may take up more than one lane to avoid hitting obstacles such as mailboxes and road signs.
- Do not use a cellphone and avoid other distracting activities while driving on rural roads.

Roads in the area pass through farm country and except for Interstate 75, all may have farm equipment traveling on them. During the harvest season, motorists will be sharing roads with tractors, combines, grain carts, grain trucks, and other farm machinery. Be alert and get to your destination safely.

More information on rural roadway safety may be found at the Ohio State University Extension ag law library website, https://farmoffice.osu.edu/our-library/roadway-and-equipment-law and on the OSU Ag Safety and Health website, https://agsafety.osu.edu/

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