

While rural life often includes idyllic and peaceful country roads, traffic on these roads picks up during harvest, which increases the chances for accidents to occur between farm equipment and vehicles.

“Motorists and those driving farm equipment and grain trucks need to be cautious and alert while driving through the countryside,” said Don Hutchens, executive director of the Nebraska Corn Board. “Farm equipment is larger than it may appear, and generally moves slow on the roadway. It may only take a couple of seconds to close that distance if you are traveling at highway speeds.”

To emphasize safety on the roadway, Sept. 20-26 is National Farm Safety Health Week with a theme of “Rural Roadway Safety: Alert, Aware and Alive.”

According to the Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health, there are on average more than 1,100 crashes between farm equipment and motor vehicles annually in the center’s nine-state region of Nebraska, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin. More than 250 of these crashes involve nonfatal injuries and 22 result in fatalities.

“Farmers also need to remain patient and take their time—and make time to rest,” Hutchens said. “Harvest can certainly be intense, but we want people to be safe when they are operating or are around equipment that has the potential to be quite dangerous.”

Agriculture remains one of the most dangerous occupations in North America, but exercising caution, getting rest and being safety-minded can go a long ways towards making it safe.

Some examples of fall farm activities that raise the risk factor and deserve special attention:

- Rural intersections will have heavier-than-normal travel and dusty conditions may limit visibility, as can sun glare in the morning and evening. Standing crops in the field may also block a clear view of oncoming traffic. Heavily loaded trucks and grain trailers can’t stop as quickly as passenger cars, and farm vehicles move slower on the road, which means passenger cars and trucks can close in very quickly.
- Power take offs need to be well protected to avoid any contact with clothing or people during operation.
- Make sure safety shields are in place on all equipment everyday— they are there for a reason and are important. The same is true of equipment safety instructions.
- Always be aware of power lines that can come in contact with moving equipment and augers around grain bins.
- Grain bins deserve special attention and caution when grain is being loaded and removed. Safety measures should be put in place to avoid any risk of entrapment and suffocation.
- Take periodic breaks to help avoid fatigue. Take a rest break for a few minutes, go for a short walk or check in with family members.
- Use extra caution when backing equipment. It is easy to overlook something or, more importantly someone, especially a child.
- Protective eye and ear wear is important in many situations.
- Watch railroad crossings. There is heavy traffic on railroads and crossings can be very dangerous.