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Farm Safety During Harvest Season

In a couple of weeks, we will enter harvest season, which makes it a good time to review safety procedures.

More farm accidents occur during Fall than any other time of the year and usually involve one or more individuals. Special care should be taken with children and senior citizens around farm and grain-handling equipment, as these groups are the most vulnerable to farm accidents. The week of September 18-24 has been designated as National Farm Safety Week, which is intended to bring extra focus on farm safety issues and priorities during harvest season.

Farming is one of the few industries in which family members often work and live on the same premises. This makes farm families at much higher risk for fatal and non-fatal injuries, compared to most other professions. Based on USDA data, there are over 1.6 million full-time workers on U.S. farms, with a large number of youth under 20 years-of-age residing on farms. Recent data shows that over half of the youth population residing on farms performed some type of farm work, as well as thousands of additional youth that were hired to do work on farms.

The rate of fatalities in the agriculture industry has declined in recent years, but still remains the highest of any industry sector, according to data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. There also continues to be a large number of traffic accidents in Minnesota and other Midwestern states that involve farm machinery.

Tractor overturns are the leading cause of death for farm workers. The most effective way to prevent tractor-related injuries and deaths is to make sure that tractors have properly installed and maintained rollover protection structures. As recently as 2006, it was estimated that less than 60 percent of the approximate 4.4 million farm tractors in the U.S. were properly equipped with rollover protection.

It is also ill-advised to have children riding on a tractor when the tractor will be in vulnerable positions and/or during the busy harvest season.

Research has shown that fatigue is another major contributor to farm accidents, especially in the Fall. Farm operators are usually in a hurry

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to finish harvest and follow-up tillage in a timely fashion before Winter sets in, which can be especially challenging later in the harvest season. Some ways to reduce fatigue at harvest time include getting adequate sleep, scheduling planned work breaks, eating healthy, drinking plenty of water, getting some exercise, and having enough help in place.

Another big danger in the Fall occurs when farmers are moving equipment or hauling grain on highways and rural roads. Farmers should use flashing lights and slow moving vehicle signs when traveling on roadways. The general public also needs to pay extra attention when driving on rural roads during harvest season, especially before and after work or school. Farm implements are larger and move much slower than cars, and the Autumn sun is usually in a blinding position during the times of heaviest traffic (in the mornings and late afternoon).

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