

Farm Equipment, Safety on the Road

BROOKINGS, S.D - Even though fall harvest is a ways off, we still encounter farm equipment on the road. Whether it is a tractor and baler, someone hauling feed between farms or silage equipment - during the growing and harvest season, producers and motorists need to be vigilant while sharing the road.

Column by Tracey Erickson, SDSU Dairy Extension Field Specialist

As motorists, there are things we need to remember. First patience is key. Most farm equipment operating on roadways is traveling at speeds between 15-25 miles per hour (mph). The Slow Moving Vehicle (SMV) emblem on equipment it is an immediate warning to slow down.

Motorists also need to remember it may be necessary to operate farm equipment on the roadways to move between fields or farms. Farm equipment is entitled to travel roadways legally.

An example that is often

cited is that if you are driving 55 mph and come upon farm equipment that is driving 15 mph, it will only take five seconds to close a gap the length of a football field between you and the farm equipment.

Motorists need to be aware of the fact that producers are not always able to see vehicles sharing the roadway with them. However, once they know you are there, they will attempt to pull over to let the motorist pass, if they are able to do so safely.

If the farm equipment is unable to pull off to the side of the road, and you choose to pass, please do so with caution using the following guidelines:

* Be aware of other vehicles behind you that may also be trying to pass.

* If you enter the oncoming lane of traffic, do not pass unless you are able to see clearly in front of you and the farm equipment you are passing.

* Do not pass if there

are incoming hills or curves which may block your view.

* Do not pass if you are in a designated "No Passing Zone" or within 100 feet of any intersection, railroad crossing, or bridge.

* Do not assume if farm equipment slows down and pulls out to the right that they will be turning right or is letting you pass. Due to the size of today's farm equipment many must execute very wide left-hand turns and in fact may be turning left instead. Check for hand signals, turn signals, or approaches.

* Remember that farm equipment is very large and cannot stop on a dime.

Agricultural producers also need to do their part as they share the roadways. All vehicles that move less than 25 mph must be equipped with a SMV reflective emblem. The emblem should be kept clean, must be visible, and replacement is recommended every 2-3 years. Producers should also place

reflective tape on equipment marking the edges of the farm equipment, helping to increase visibility. In regards to lighting and traversing roadways with farm equipment keep the following in mind:

* Tractors or other farm equipment that is operated on roadways must be equipped with lights if operated on roads at night or when there are conditions of reduced visibility.

* Use your flashing amber lights to increase motorist awareness when entering the roadway, but turn your rear spotlights off, as they are often mistaken for headlights.

* Putting flashing amber lights on older equipment that may not have lights will help signal motorist attention. Temporary magnetic lighting is available for older farm equipment. The key is keeping the battery charged and working.

* Try to avoid major roadways during high traffic periods, rush hour,

bad weather or at night if possible.

* If it is necessary to travel long distances on the roadways, consider using pilot cars in front and behind of the farm equipment, especially at night. Make sure pilot cars use their flashing lights or hang a bright flag in the window.

* Installation of mirrors on equipment will help you view motorists around you.

* Lock brake pedals together for road travel, as sudden braking on one wheel can cause a tractor to skid and lose control.

* Check all towed equipment to make sure it is properly secured and balanced along with having proper lighting and reflective equipment. It should also be towed by equipment that is able to tow it adequately and stop it under control.

* Whenever feasible take steps to make equipment as "traffic friendly" as possible. Combines with wide heads are very difficult to see

around and/or pass. Putting the head on a trailer creates fewer problems for other vehicles to safely pass.

* Traveling at appropriate speeds will allow you to maintain control at all times.

* Make sure all employees who may be operating farm equipment on public roadways are trained adequately and are aware of the rules of the road.

* Stay alert of all hazards on the road such as soft or steep shoulders, bridges, ruts, narrow roadways, potholes or objects on the path of travel.

* When cars are lined up behind you, and there is a suitable shoulder or approach please pull over and let the traffic pass.

Whether you are a motorist or agriculture producer traveling on roadways, remember we must all obey the traffic rules, which includes no texting and appropriate use of cell phones. Courtesy and patience are key to safety on the road.

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A complete listing of items appeared in last week's issue

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