

# MAFES Dawg Tracks



June 16, 2008

Ten Commandments of Tractor



Statistics show that in the USA there are 300 to 400 tractor-related deaths each year. 50% of these deaths are attributed to rollovers. As redundant as I sound, if ROPS and SEATBELTS were used, all of these accidents could have been prevented. Other types of tractor deaths result from rollovers, falls, crushes and PTO entanglement. Although each new model year shows more improvement in safety issues, as noted above, tractors are still involved in many accidents.

Following are 10 items (commandants) of tractor safety that will help you to become safer in tractor use and will reduce the number of accidents:

**#1 Know your tractor** - Owners and experienced farm employees usually are familiar with and knowledgeable about the general operation of their tractors. However, what about new employees? The best investment in a new employee is to have them read the manufacturer's instruction manual, assign an experienced employee to take them "under wing" and orient them on all the facets of safe operation and all the daily maintenance checks. This is good insurance and good farm management practice, besides insuring that the equipment and maintenance of the unit will give you a long and extended trouble-free life. And you still have the added benefit of time and money savings.

**#2 Rollover Protective Structures (ROPS)** - I hope you don't think that I'm "beating a dead horse" with so many references to the use of ROPS and SEATBELTS. But as you read various articles regarding the use of these and see the statistics of accident and fatality free numbers, it makes you work to entice folks to use them.

**#3 Drive safely** - Just as important as the knowledge of the operation of the tractor and good maintenance practices, it is just as important to know how to use the tractor in the field in various types of terrain. Avoid operating a tractor within six feet of holes, ditches and embankments. Anything closer may be soft and cause a cave-in.

Avoid steep slopes - Steep slopes compromise the stability of the tractor. If it is necessary to operate on slopes, keep the spacing as wide as possible and work with the attachments on the uphill side of the tractor. Operate at slow and manageable rates of speed with the tractor in low gear for added help.

Reduce speed - When you are turning onto or off a road or at row ends, slow down and avoid high speeds. Tractors, unlike trucks or cars, will turn over at high speeds. Consider the attachments, such as mowers, front end buckets, or towed implements when you consider the rate of speed.

In many cases, tractors will never see the open road, but sooner or later they do. Equip your tractors with Slow Moving Vehicle Signs (SMV). Blinking lights and safety clearance flags should be visible on the tractors. The maintenance checks (such as lights, tire pressure, and other conditions) for tractors are important when moving across the open road. A tool kit, first aid kit, and a fire extinguisher should always be equipped on the tractor. All of these factors are important, but the one thing we must remember is whether we are on county or state roads, we should be very vigilant of other vehicles. It is surprising, but other vehicles underestimate the limitations of farm equipment; therefore, sometimes they aren't attentive to your signals.

**#4 Never start a tractor inside a structure** - Always open doors when you start a tractor inside. Closed spaces fill up with carbon monoxide gas very quickly. Always maintain adequate ventilation.

**#5 PTO Shields** - Tractor PTOs can be a serious hazard. A PTO running at 1,000 rpm will pull clothing at a rate of 8 feet per second. You can't react that fast and the PTO can't be stopped. Always keep a good shield in place.

**#6 Hitches and drawbars** - Always hitching to the drawbar; anything higher, like the axle or seat bracket, can cause the tractor to backspin very quickly.

**#7 Never leave a tractor running and unattended** - Always shut down the tractor or equipment if you are leaving the area. The risk of fire or inattention can far outweigh the benefit. It is a good practice that anytime you are leaving the tractor, remove the keys and take them with you.

**#8 Fuel when cool** - We should never refuel a tractor while it is running or when the engine is hot. Not only is gasoline highly flammable, but it can be explosive as well. Allow ample time for refueling.

**#9 No Riders** - The rule of "one seat-one rider" should always be in effect. There is only one seatbelt with ROPS and that is for the operator.

**#10 Speed and carelessness kill** - Please don't rush while operating a tractor. The only acceptable speed for a tractor is a "safe" speed. Allow ample time to get to the work site, ample time to complete the project and ample time to rest. If you have a wreck, you sure can't perform; if you have to rush, then you are leaving yourself open for mistakes. Tractors don't get tired, but operators do. Fatigue leaves openings for errors and inattentiveness. Operating a tractor in the field can get fatiguing and sometimes monotonous. When this happens, forget the time. Get down off the tractor, stretch or walk a little to "loosen up."