



MAFES Dawg Tracks

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Handling Large Bales Safely



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Hay processing is predominantly done with large bales all over the country now, due to the labor efficiency and savings. Along with the large bale capability comes the hazards that we should consider. The biggest risk and the one responsible for most injuries and deaths—is the physical nature of the baler themselves. These big round bales range in weight from 500 lbs to 2000 lbs.

KNOWLEDGE IS CRUCIAL:

- Everyone involved in large bale production should know the specific requirements, precautions and hazards associated with the large bale operation.
- Each person involved in large bale production should read the owner's manual before working with the machine.
- Employers and supervisors have this responsibility: To know that all employees involved be familiar with all facets of the large bale operation.

ADVANCE PRE-HARVEST PREPARATIONS:

A comprehensive maintenance program should be in effect before the hay season to minimize the down time from inefficient maintenance and also to minimize the chances of an accident. Below is a checklist that will help to identify possible hazards and improve the production efficiency:

- Clear or clean all the residue of debris and lubricate the baler according to the owner's manual.
- Check for loose or missing nuts, fittings, screws, guards, or damaged pickup teeth. Replace missing guards and shields.
- Inspect all belts and chains for wear or breakage. Adjust or replace as needed and refer to the owner's manual for assistance as needed.
- Check all hydraulic hoses and connections for wear, leaks, and that the connections are properly connected.
- Check the slip clutch, rolls scraper, and the rear gate latch to be sure that it is adjusted correctly.
- Check lights, reflectors, and SMV. Fire extinguishers should be charged and ready for use. They should be on the tractor and the baler.

OPERATING THE BALER:

We emphasize that the operator must be thoroughly familiar with the operation of the equipment. He needs to be very familiar with all the components and systems and their functions on the tractor and baler.

- Be sure that all the protective devices are in place and are securely fastened.

- Before start up, recheck for broken, missing, or damaged parts. Check the tires and the hydraulic system for leaks, etc. (using a piece of wood or cardboard is a good way to check for leaks). Obviously, repairs or replacements should be made before going to the field.
- Re check to be sure that all debris is clear from the shields and covers around the machinery.
- Make sure that all parts have been lubricated.

Always turn off the tractor engine and remove the key, disengage the PTO to make any adjustments or repairs to the baler.

PREPARING TO BALE:

- Even though one might be familiar with the hay field, time should be taken to check for debris or holes and dips from ground shifts that could cause harm to the operator or the equipment or maybe both. Check overhead power lines that might cause a problem when raising the rear gate.
- The pickup should be adjusted for adequate ground clearance. Obviously, if the tines hit the ground the operator could be sprayed with dirt and rocks and the baler wouldn't feed properly.
- Engage the PTO while the equipment is stationary to look and listen for possible trouble.
- Check the hydraulic systems for proper functioning.
- Check the product to be sure the moisture content is acceptable. Wet hay in many cases causes plugging.
- Ground speed should be matched to crop conditions and the size of the windrow. The pickup should be high enough to insure that the product can enter the inlet sufficiently.
- Never try to unplug, clean out or adjust baler when it is operating. Wait until all the motion has stopped before approaching the baler. Severe injury or death can occur. I know of a death recently through a faulty latch on the rear gate (the man was beheaded).
- Don't try to hand feed product into the machine - the hay will be taken in faster than you can let go.

SAFE EJECTION:

- When there is a doubt, refer to the operator's manual for proper procedure of discharging bales.
- Be careful not to eject on a hillside. A rolling bale down a hillside can cause serious injury or death. No person should be around the baler when it is ejecting.
- For manual ejection: Shift the tractor into neutral or park, disengage the PTO, and lock the brakes. Raise the tailgate hydraulically, lock it in place, then shut the tractor off and remove the ignition key.