

Small tractors are just as dangerous!

For many years, agricultural safety professionals have been searching for answers to the hazards associated with farm tractor operations, according to Dr. Sam Steel at Penn State University. Steel notes that when the annual data is published each year, overturning tractors result in approximately 200 deaths nationwide. In rural America, it has almost become a way of life; an accepted risk inherent with the dangerous job of farming.

But suburbia now experiences similar problems, notes Dr. Steel. Smaller-sized lawn and garden tractors are often blamed for tragic incidents, but it's often the way in which the equipment is being operated that is the culprit. Some of the reasons are similar, some are different. A quick analysis by Steel indicates that:

- Extra-riders are universally at-risk! No operator can pay the full time attention that is needed to operate a large or small tractor with a child or passenger riding along.
- Young tractor operators are exposed to similar risks. Children and youth are risk-takers and they tend to overstate and overestimate their own capabilities.
- Tractors without roll-over protection, whether operating on farmland, or on a manicured lawn can be dangerous. Slopes are often the culprit, but drop-offs near a stream or retaining wall can have disastrous results.
- Fueling a tractor in rural or urban America can be dangerous when rules are not followed. A hot engine and careless gasoline spills can result in serious and debilitating burns. And, don't ever attempt to fuel any size tractor in an enclosed garage or building.
- Once a thorough litter and debris check of the area to be mowed has been done, all bystanders, children and pets should be kept away until the small tractor and its mower has completed its work.

Steel summarizes it this way: it's wise to resist the urge to use your small tractor when the slopes are too steep or too wet; and it's also important to keep extra-riders off! Those operators who don't are just asking for trouble; trouble that could result in a serious injury to themselves or to their children.