

Farm Safety Awareness

By Senator Tom Harkin

With harvest season about to begin, it's time to remember that the families and workers who produce our nation's agricultural abundance are engaged in one of most hazardous of all occupations. Each year, since President Franklin D. Roosevelt's first proclamation in 1944, one week is dedicated to focus attention on and promote farm safety and health.

This year's National Farm Safety and Health Week will be September 20 – 26, with the special theme for 2009 being "Rural Roadway Safety: Alert, Aware and Alive." Statistics tell a story of far too many deaths and injuries that could have been avoided.

The National Safety Council estimates some 15,000 collisions involving farm vehicles occur on U.S. roadways each year. Farm equipment roadway collisions cause an average of 94 fatalities each year according to the U.S. National Traffic Safety Administration's Fatality Analysis Reporting System.

The Iowa Department of Transportation notes the most common time of day for collisions is between 4 p.m. and 8 p.m. and that studies show that left-turn, rear-end and passing collisions are the most common types of farm vehicle roadway accidents.

As farmers across Iowa begin harvest, our roadways will see increased farm equipment traffic. As we observe National Farm Safety and Health Week, here are a few tips for motorists and farm equipment operators to help make Iowa's roadways safer – during harvest and planting seasons and throughout the year:

- Keep alert and watch closely for slow-moving vehicles, and slow down immediately upon spotting one. Most agricultural equipment travels at 25 miles per hour (mph) or less. A motorist traveling at 55 mph who is a football field's length behind a vehicle going 25 mph will close the distance in only five seconds.
- Farm equipment can be longer and wider than it appears. Motorists should be patient, since the farmer may not be able to move over to allow you to pass. Only pass farm equipment when it is safe to do so, with plenty of room to get around and ahead.
- Farmers must remember to place slow moving vehicle (SMV) emblems on equipment traveling at less than 25 mph and make sure they are clearly visible, clean and not faded.
- Farm equipment operators should use warning flashers as well as signal lights or proper hand signals to indicate to motorists their location and intentions in advance of turns.
- Slow moving vehicles should be driven in the right-hand lane as close to the road's edge as is safe, not half on the road, half on the shoulder. Equipment operators should not

encourage or signal motorists when to pass but should pull over when safe to allow traffic to pass.

- Operators should consider using an escort vehicle and other warnings to oncoming motorists when moving wide equipment on roadways, especially at night.

With common-sense care and caution, motorists can reach their destinations safely, farmers can get their work done safely, and we can avoid needless roadway injuries and fatalities. I wish everyone a safe harvest season!