

Travel Safely with Tractors and Machinery on Public Roads

By Jim Carrabba and Sharon Scofield

New York Center for Agricultural Medicine & Health (NYCAMH) and
The Northeast Center (NEC)

An important safety issue for motorists and agricultural producers is travel over the road with tractors; self-propelled equipment, and towed equipment. Agricultural equipment is becoming bigger. As farms become larger in size and spread out over more area, farmers are spending a lot more time traveling with their tractors and equipment on public roads. Agricultural equipment on the road can be hazardous to both farmers and motorists. Most farm equipment usually travels 25 miles per hour (mph) or less in areas where the speed limit may be posted at 55 mph. This can be a dangerous situation for a motorist going at 55 mph on the highway approaching farm equipment at 15 mph can be on the equipment's "back door" in less than 7 seconds (while traveling 400 feet). This does not give the motorist much time to react. According to the National Safety Council, roadway collisions that involve farm vehicles on US roads total more than 15,000 per year. More than two-thirds of these collisions involve the farm vehicle being hit from behind, but collisions can also occur when the tractor and equipment tries to make left turns or by sideswipes. Over 90% of these collisions occur in the daylight and on dry roads. Usually, when the fatality occurs, the victim is the tractor operator.

For motorists: How do you drive safely when encountering farm machinery on public roadways?

- Avoid a collision by slowing down immediately when you see agricultural equipment on the road with Slow Moving Vehicle (SMV) emblems. SMV emblems are meant to warn you to slow down and that the equipment displaying the SMV emblem travels at less than 25 mph.
- Be alert for agricultural equipment with SMV emblems, reflectors, or flashing lights.
- Expect to see more agricultural equipment on roadways during the busy agricultural seasons, such as the spring planting season, but be alert for farm equipment on the road at any time of year.
- Be careful when trying to pass equipment, as the operator may not see or hear you. Be patient, do not pass the slow moving equipment unless it is absolutely safe to do so.
- Pass with caution, as the equipment may be longer and wider than you think.
- Be aware of possible left hand turns into fields.
- It is illegal to use SMV emblems on stationary objects such as driveway markers, fence posts or mailboxes. By law, SMV emblems are only to be used on slow moving vehicles. Misuse of the SMV emblem obscures the meaning of the emblem.

For farmers: How do you travel safely over the road with your farm equipment?

- Use SMV emblems to show that your equipment is traveling 25 mph or less.
- According to the law, SMV emblems must be clean and unfaded. New SMV emblems can be reflective up to 1200 feet. You might have to replace SMV emblems every couple of years as they fade or get broken.
- SMV emblems only cost \$8 to \$10. NYCAMH has SMV emblems available for sale in decals, plastic, or metal. You can purchase these on our website www.nycamh.com, on the PPE page, or through our PPE catalog, or by calling 800-343-7527.
- Being in compliance with the SMV regulations can protect your liability.

- If your towed equipment obscures the SMV emblem or lights on your tractor, place SMV emblems and lights on your towed equipment.
- Check your SMV emblem, marking tape and lights before road travel. Make sure everything is in place and functioning properly.
- SMV emblems are placed with the triangle pointing up, in the center of the vehicle, two to six feet above the road.
- Use flashers and turn signals to indicate your location and intentions.
- Use reflective extremity marking tape to show the size of farm equipment.
- Pull over and allow traffic to pass, when it is safe to do so and you can pull off the road entirely with your equipment. Do not wave the other drivers on, you might be held liable if they have a motor vehicle crash.
- Try to avoid or minimize road travel when it is dark or during times of bad weather or poor visibility.
- Use an escort vehicle if moving large equipment on the road.
- Consider installing service roads in your fields along busy highways to eliminate travel on the highway wherever it might be feasible to do so.

These guidelines apply to New York State Law. Please check with your state's Department of Motor Vehicles, police or local law enforcement officials about traveling on public roads with your tractors and machinery.

For on-farm safety training or farm safety information in New York or the Northeast contact The New York Center for Agricultural Medicine and Health (NYCAMH) or the Northeast Center at 800-343-7527 or jcarrabba@nycamh.com, ameyerhoff@nycamh.com, or sscofield@nycamh.com. A program of Bassett Healthcare in Cooperstown, NY, NYCAMH promotes safe and healthy farming.