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Tuesday, September 10, 2013

SMV emblem celebrates 50 years of safety

Source: Karen Funkenbusch, 573-882-2731

COLUMBIA, Mo. – A simple, inexpensive emblem likely responsible for saving countless of lives nationally is now 50 years old.

University of Missouri Extension rural safety and health specialist Karen Funkenbusch said the slow-moving vehicle emblem, adopted 50 years ago by the National Safety Council, is one of the most recognized emblems in the country.

With National Farm Safety and Health Week set for Sept. 15-21 and harvest season approaching, it is a good time to remember the emblem's importance in reminding motorists to "share the road" with farmers, Funkenbusch said.

Acceptance of the slow-moving vehicle emblem was slow in itself. The idea began as early as the 1950s when Ohio State's Department of Agriculture of Engineering conducted a 10-year study of tractor fatalities. Research by Ken Harkness and funded by the Automotive Safety Foundation focused on slow-moving vehicle accidents and showed that 65 percent of motor vehicle accidents involving SMVs were rear-end collisions.

By 1962, Harkness supervised the design and testing of the sign. Tests of human recognition of different shapes and colors on simulated SMVs resulted in the triangle with a fluorescent orange center and reflective borders that is still used today.

Goodyear first unveiled the SMV on the back of a farm wagon towed by a Ford tractor on a cross-country public awareness promotion.

The formal introduction came in 1962 at a University of Iowa safety seminar. Deere & Company played a major role in the adoption of the emblem by the American Society of Agricultural Engineers.

In 1963, the president of Ohio State University dedicated the emblem and the Agricultural Engineering Journal printed its first article with color illustrations. The National Safety Council promoted the adoption of the emblem.

Funkenbusch offers these guidelines on use of the SMV emblem:

- Mount the SMV emblem point-up at the rear of the vehicle. The emblem should be used on any vehicle, including horse-drawn buggies, historical vehicles and ATVs, traveling 25 miles per hour or less.
- New drivers may not be familiar with increased slow-moving vehicle traffic during planting and harvest time, so parents should bring this to their young driver's attention. Young drivers also should be aware that these rules apply to horse-drawn buggies common in areas near Amish communities.
- Do not mount the emblem on non-moving items. The emblem should be used as a unique indicator of a slow-moving vehicle.
- The SMV is not a substitute for lights or other warning devices.
- Keep SMVs clean. As part of your routine for the new planting season, check the condition of signs on all farm vehicles and replace them as needed.

For more information, contact your local MU Extension office or Funkenbusch at 800-995-8503.

The Missouri statute on SMV use can be found at www.moga.mo.gov/statutes/c300-399/3070000127.htm.

Photos available for this release:

Link: <http://extension.missouri.edu/NewsAdmin/Photos/stock/SMV.jpg>

Cutline: Monroe County farmer Kent Blades is a strong advocate for slow-moving vehicle signs and has flashing beacons on all of his farm implements. He was seriously injured when his farm implement was struck by a truck.

Credit: Photo by Emily Kaiser