

## OPERATING FARM EQUIPMENT

An unwanted safety trend is happening in rural America with an increase in motor vehicle versus farm equipment incidents on our rural roadways. Only 19 percent of the U.S. population live in rural areas, but there are significantly more crashes in rural areas than urban areas. In 2010, fatal crashes in rural areas accounted for 55% of all traffic fatalities nationwide. A variety of risk factors are associated with these increased numbers, such as increased urbanization in rural areas, no or narrow shoulders, slow moving vehicles, hills and curves, blind intersections, and loose surface material.

Distracted driving is responsible for a number of these incidents, and we are seeing several agencies running ad campaigns about the danger of distracted driving including the National Highway Traffic Safety Administrations (NHTSA) campaign of “one text or call could wreck it all.” NHTSA stats show that in 2010, 3,092 people were killed in crashes involving a distracted driver, and an estimated additional 416,000 were injured in motor vehicle crashes involving a distracted driver.

Farmers can help avoid collisions by making sure that they have up-to-date lighting and clearly visible Slow Moving Vehicle emblems, and retro- reflective markings outlining the motorized farm equipment or implements. Farmers should also consider using flashing lights on equipment and moving equipment during daylight hours when possible. Many crashes between farm equipment and passenger vehicles occur at dusk during spring planting and fall harvest season and often involve the farm equipment being rear-ended or sideswiped by motor vehicles.

Operators of farm equipment should always wear seatbelts if the equipment has them and only allow an extra rider if the equipment is built with an instructional seat and seatbelt. Extra riders that are not restrained can be injured in a collision and can be a distraction for the operator of the farm equipment. Just as with motor vehicles, farm operators should limit cell phone usage and texting to times when they are not operating the equipment.

