

Road Safety – Avoiding a Collision

by Cheryl Skjolaas, University of Wisconsin

You are heading back to the farmstead with another load of forage. The left turn signal is activated to let motorist know you plan to turn ahead. It is hard to see if any other vehicles are behind you even with the extended mirrors. You check around the wagon as best you can and proceed to make the turn. CRASH! The motorist, going too fast, did not realize you were turning and decided to pass. This left hand turn situation is very common for operators of agricultural equipment. So what can you do this season to reduce the potential for a collision with a motor vehicle?

Be Seen by the Motorist. Lights (head and tail), turn signals, hazard flashers, slow-moving vehicle (SMV) emblem, reflectors and retro-reflective marking tape are all part of being seen by the motorist. You should check with your individual state Department of Transportation for any special lighting and marking requirements. If your equipment is older, look to retrofit it with some of the newer lighting and marking equipment as a way to increase your visibility on the road. A light bar with turn signals and flashers would be a good addition to the back of a forage wagon. One operator shared that the amber beacons highway department trucks use make a big difference to motorists seeing them on the road, especially in low light conditions. A few strips of reflective marking tape as extremity marking will help the motorist see the width of the equipment. As part of your daily inspection, include checking that lights, turn signals, hazard flashers are all working. Be sure to clean the light and reflector covers and the SMV emblems.

Replace any faded or worn SMV emblems. The SMV emblem was designed to inform motorists that the implement ahead travels under 25 mph. The SMV emblem should be visible from 600-1,000 feet in daylight conditions or in lawful low beams of headlights and mounted 2-10 feet above the ground. If traveling over 25 mph, be sure to remove the SMV emblem.

It is important to signal to motorists your intent to turn. If you have turn signals, use them or otherwise use the appropriate hand signal. It is a basic rule of the road to signal your intent to turn. If a crash occurs and you did not signal your intent, you have a greater liability for the crash.

Consider Your Equipment and Travel Routes. First, if your machines have a road position for transport, be sure to place it in road position prior to traveling on the road. It may take some extra time, but if the equipment causes an accident, you could lose more than time.

Travel at the appropriate speed for your equipment. For example, you have a fully loaded forage wagon and will use a truck to pull the load. While you could travel faster than if a tractor was pulling the wagon, you may exceed the rating of the wagon's tires. This could lead to the wagon swerving over the center line and into an on-coming vehicle causing a collision.

Pre-plan your travel times or routes. You know that a local factory lets out at 3:00 pm and traffic gets heavy. Maybe this would be a good time to take a break. Alternatively, could you possibly travel a different route and avoid the extra traffic?

An escort vehicle may be appropriate for wide loads, highly traveled roads or to increase visibility during hours of darkness. The escort vehicle should have their hazard warning lights operating at all times.

Share the Road but Be Safe. You know there is a line of traffic behind you and feel like you should be pulling off to let the traffic go by. It would be appropriate to let the traffic pass but only when you can safely pull the entire tractor and vehicle train or implement off the road. If you're traveling partially on the road and then need to get back onto the road due to a road hazard ahead; the motorist behind you may not predict this action and decide to pass. You should be using either the whole lane or be entirely on the shoulder. Straddling between the lane and shoulder adds to the dangers of road travel.

Waving the motorist by may seem like a neighborly thing to do. However, it is not recommended that you motion the motorist to pass. Doing so means you assume the liability for the driver. The driver could then pull out into traffic or other road hazards and you would have added liability.

Always follow the rules of the road and be a good driver. Be sure that the operator of your equipment has the experience to handle the road situation and the equipment that he/she will be driving. If you are using trucks for hauling, know that the driver has a valid license. Sharing the road means you do your best to share the road safely at all times.

