



Tailgate Safety Talk

Information You Can Use to Prevent Accidents & Injuries

Right-of-Way Mowing

1. DRIVING TO THE WORK AREA

Driving at high speeds has resulted in a number of tractor accidents. The risk of overturning also increases when tractors are driven at road speeds. Quick maneuvers also increase the likelihood of overturning. Using the brakes while turning can also cause the tractor to tip over. Before taking a tractor mower out on the highway, always be sure that it has the slow-moving vehicle sign, as well as working lights and warning flags.

If the mowing attachment doesn't have its own brake system, it is important to keep a safe and slow speed. A heavy rolling load that can't be controlled by the tractor can jackknife. Slow down while turning off the road. Remember that turning onto gravel makes the situation more hazardous. Avoid very sharp turns since they can cause your mowing attachments to jackknife.

Be cautious when crossing a highway. Always let the traffic clear and make sure that you have enough time to cross. Attachments such as batwings, over the fence mowers and flail mowers should be secured in the travel position with all locking/securement devices in place before driving on the road. Always raise them before crossing a bridge. Come to a complete stop at railroad crossings and look both ways to make sure a train is not approaching. Obey all traffic laws and be sure your tractor and mowing equipment stay within a single lane.

2. SAFETY IN THE WORK AREA

Before starting the job, make sure the "Mowing Ahead" signs are in place if your equipment is going to operate on or over the highway. The distance between the sign and the operation should not exceed 5 miles as per local guidelines and as terrain allows, considering sightlines and cross streets. It is advisable to place a warning sign after intersections, as well.

Mowing can sometimes be one big obstacle course. You need to be alert for rough ground and hidden culvert holes that might cause the tractor to overturn. If possible, check the area beforehand to locate natural obstacles like hidden rocks, tree stumps, low hanging branches, and overgrown gullies. Take note of any signs, posts, fences, mailboxes, and utility pedestals. Remember that at even relatively slow speeds, running over a hidden object can raise one side of the tractor and make for a rough ride. Be especially careful when mowing around signs. If you accidentally knock one down, report it to your supervisor as soon as possible.

Driving too close to the edge of a ditch or bank is another major cause of mower accidents. In the event that you do become stuck in a ditch or muddy area, don't put anything under the wheels to provide traction. Also, don't increase speed and pop the clutch. Either of these practices can cause the front end of the tractor to jump and rotate around the rear axle, possibly injuring you.

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First, try backing out. If this doesn't work, dig out an area in front of the rear wheels, shift into low gear, use moderate engine speed and engage the clutch slowly. It may also help to dig out the area in front of the tractor if the tires aren't already on solid ground. If nothing works, notify your supervisor and use truck or call for a wrecker to remove tractor so you don't cause additional damage.

3. SAFETY ON THE SLOPES

Because of the weight distribution of tractor mowers, there is a risk of rollovers when mowing on slopes. When starting up a hill, engage the clutch gently. Popping the clutch can cause the mower to tip backwards. You might even want to back up the hill but if this is not possible, climb the hill at an angle. If the slope is steep, use a low gear to keep the engine from stalling. If it does stall, set the brake immediately. Apply power gradually after starting up.

The tractor chassis is built high off the ground so it can clear low obstacles. This means it has a high center of gravity and is somewhat top heavy for use on slopes. You know the feeling when driving sideways on a steep slope. There's a tendency to overturn. If the tractor does start to tip, steer the front wheels downhill, not uphill. Turning downhill will quickly increase the tractor's stability and help prevent an overturn. Be sure to check the operator's manual for maximum slope angles and DO NOT exceed these angles when mowing as a potential rollover condition may exist once exceeded.

Keep the tractor in gear while going downhill and let the engine act as a brake to slow down the load. If the load brakes too much, open the throttle slightly. If the engine doesn't supply enough braking power, assist by pressing on both brake pedals. Never take the tractor out of gear when going downhill. A tractor that isn't in gear runs a great risk of going out of control. Also remember that it's safer to go downhill at an angle to the slope.

4. TRACTOR OPERATING TIPS TO REMEMBER

The first step to tractor safety is to be properly trained in the operation of the tractor and its attachments. Be familiar with and follow the directions in the operator's manual. There is a potential for injury when operating a tractor if you don't pay attention to the small things. Many injuries have happened as a result of climbing on and off the tractor as well as falling off while it is in operation.

If there is a step and a platform, take time to clean off mud, grease, and other debris that builds up during operation. Don't jump from the tractor. There is always the danger of catching your clothing on pedals, levers, or anything else that might stick out. You could land on an uneven surface and injure your ankles, legs, or back. Use handrails, handholds, and steps to pull yourself up onto the tractor. Try to keep three points on the machine at all times, either two hands and one foot or two feet and one hand.

Never attempt to start a tractor from a standing position while standing on the ground. Always start the tractor from a seated position on the tractor. Do all of your driving while sitting in the seat and fasten the seat belt if your tractor is equipped with rollover protection. Never operate a tractor while riding on the drawbar, sitting on the fender, standing on the steps, or sitting on the backrest of the operator's seat. Keep your speed under control. Never drive so fast that the front wheels of the tractor bounce. Watch ahead for obstructions and avoid them. Slow down before making turns.

Users of this tailgate talk are advised to determine the suitability of the information as it applies to local situations and work practices and its conformance with applicable laws and regulations.