

Look Out for Farm Equipment on Highways!

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

We are headed into one of the busier times of year for agricultural producers which means that any of us are likely to encounter farm equipment on highways and country roads. Which leads me to plead with everyone out there behind the wheel of a vehicle to be extra alert and cautious. Far too many people are injured or killed, annually, in accidents involving farm equipment. Sadly, most of it comes from drivers of vehicles failing to pay attention and heeding the reality and limitations of that equipment when it is on the highway.

The first thing to keep in mind is that every piece of farm equipment going down the highway has a legal right to be there! Yes, that equipment is going slow, it is big and you get impatient, but it has all the rights to the roadway that you do and the same requirement to obey the traffic laws as you do.

If you notice that two tone orange triangular reflective sign or decal on farm equipment, realize that it is there for a reason. It indicates that the equipment is slow moving equipment and will be traveling less than 25 mph. It is reflective to help you see it in dim light. It also means that there are certain stipulations that the operator of that vehicle needs to follow.

One of the critical ones is that when more than three vehicles line up behind the slow moving equipment, the operator must pull over and let the traffic around, WHEN it is safe to do so. If they are going down a road with no shoulder and no adequate intersection to pull over on, then they just keep going. It doesn't matter if there are 25 vehicles behind that equipment, if it isn't safe to pull over, they don't. But also realize that if you are in line behind that equipment, you are still required to obey all other traffic laws. If you are in a no passing zone, you do not pass!

One of the things that scares many equipment operators, and me, is the failure of many drivers to realize how fast they are catching up to that vehicle if you are traveling normal highway speed. A vehicle traveling 20 mph (which may be a little fast for some of that equipment) is traveling at 29 feet per second. A vehicle traveling at 65 mph is traveling at 95 feet per second. If you are approaching that tractor traveling at 20 then you are catching up at the rate of 66 feet per second. At that speed you decrease the distance between you and the tractor by one football field every 4.5 seconds. If you aren't paying attention, you are on that vehicle before you even know it. If you are traveling a little over the speed limit, you will be on it even quicker! If you are a distracted driver, talking on your phone or texting, an accident is inevitable!

What I'm asking you to do is simple. Be alert for farm equipment. When you see it on the road ahead, immediately start to slow down. It's closer than you think and you have less time to react than you think. Allow plenty of time and room to maneuver safely around the piece of equipment. If you are in line behind that tractor or swather or combine, be patient! As I said at the start, they have every right to that roadway as you do. Don't get mad, don't get impatient, just allow a little time and you'll all be safely on your way soon enough.

Over the years I have lost far too many friends and acquaintances to vehicle accidents. Some involved standard vehicles, some involved farm equipment. Even one accident or one fatality is too many. Many accidents are preventable through staying alert, paying attention, slowing down earlier, and just being patient. Please, for my sake, your sake and the sake of all the farmers and ranchers out there this spring, look out for farm equipment on the roads.