Farm ATV Safety Meeting Kit

What’s At Stake

When all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) first appeared in the United States in the 1970s, they were promoted and sold as a recreational vehicle designed to provide “thrills” for the rider. Riders soon realized that ATVs are useful machines to move through areas not accessible with pick-up trucks, four-wheel drives or other motorized vehicles, and the ATV became a popular hunting vehicle. ATVs were quickly recognized for their many uses in agriculture as a substitute for pick-up trucks, horses, and even walking. The ATV is now found on all types of farms and ranches, in orchards and forests, in ornamental nurseries and on golf courses.

SELECTING AN ATV FOR AGRICULTURAL WORK

For most agricultural operations, an ATV with a coil spring shock absorber system, an automatic clutch, reverse gear, shaft drive, and a differential with a locking mechanism offers the most versatility for agricultural work. PTO capability may be desirable for some agricultural tasks.

THREE-WHEELERS VS. FOUR-WHEELERS

A four-wheeler has greater capacity for work than a three-wheeler. They are more stable and less prone to side overturns. The overwhelming asset of the four-wheeler is its stability. The sale of new three-wheeled ATVs has been banned but there are many three-wheelers still in use. Never purchase a used three-wheeler!

OPERATION

Due to the design of an ATV, it is very different to operate compared to most other machines on the farm operation. Differences in operation are evident in turning, braking, climbing, and operating on various terrains. Turning involves the operator shifting their weight for different types of turns. The operator should shift their body weight forward and towards the outside of

the turn while making the turn. When turning at a higher speed, the operator should lean their upper body towards the inside of the turn while maintaining their weight on the outer footrest. When braking, gently and evenly apply the brakes. Overturn incidents can occur on sloped terrains so it is important to remember how to climb, descend, and operate on sloped areas. When climbing an incline, the operator should shift their body weight forward while keeping both of their feet on the footrests.

What’s the Danger

ATVS AND WORK HAZARDS

ATV Overturns

A four-wheeler can do many of the tasks formerly assigned to the small farm tractor. Just as safe tractor operation is influenced by speed, terrain, and load size, so is the operation of an ATV. Steep or uneven terrain can cause an ATV overturn to happen quickly. High speed, uneven ground, ditches or large rocks increase the chance of the ATV being rolled or flipped during operation. Moving the ATV at a slower speed while shifting the operator’s weight to the upper side of the slope reduces overturn risk. Selecting an ATV with coil springs and shock absorber suspension systems will help reduce bouncing and pitching from side to side.

ATV Rollovers

In 2014, a study found that out of 130 ATV rollovers, side rolls made up 47%, rear 44%, and forward rolls 9%. Most surprising is the speed at which these rollovers occurred. It was very low with 86% of the rolls occurring at speeds of 10 mph or less and 53% occurring at less than 3 mph.

With a higher center of gravity than other motorized vehicles, ATVs are already at greater risk of rollover. Driving too fast on rough terrain, pulling loads that exceed weight limits, or trying to climb steep hills only increase the chance an ATV will roll over, eject the driver, and possibly land on top of the driver.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

ATV MAINTENANCE

Routinely check the ATV to make sure it is running properly to reduce risk of injury and the potential to be stranded due to a malfunction. An ATV has the following key areas that need to be maintained for the machine to work efficiently:

- Tires – Maintain the recommended air pressure in all tires because uneven pressure can cause the ATV to pull to one side. Nuts and bolts should be tightly secured.
- Throttle – Check the throttle to make sure it is moves smoothly.
- Brakes – Check the brakes every time before you ride.
- Lights – Check the lights to make sure they are working and wipe away any dirt to maintain optimal visibility.
- Oil and Fuel – Examine the ATV for leaks and maintain recommended fluid levels.
- Drive Train and Chassis – Check for wear, leaks, and loose parts. Replace, tighten, and lubricate parts as needed.

ATV TRAINING

No one should use an ATV without the proper training. Driver inexperience is one of the more common reasons behind ATV accidents. It’s not uncommon on a family owned farm for those younger than 16 years of age to operate an ATV, so the inexperience factor is an important one to remember.

SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPLOYEES

Since ATVs are not equipped with seat belts, it’s up to the driver to use it safely to prevent an accident. This includes being on the lookout for any hazard such as a tree, rock, rut, stream, or gully. It also includes driving at safe speeds, staying off paved roads, and not operating the vehicle under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

- ATVs are not toys; manufacturers suggestion children under the age of 12 should not operate ATVs with an engine size

over 70 cc.

- Children under the age of 16 years often lack the emotional maturity and physical size to operate or control most machines. They should not operate adult-sized ATVs or those with an engine greater than 90 cc.
- Never carry a passenger; the unique handling characteristics of an ATV require that the operator shift both weight and position on the seat to steer and control the vehicle. Extra riders hamper the operator’s ability to steer and control the ATV.
- Since ATVs are small and low to the ground, they are not as visible as larger vehicles. Lights, reflectors, and highly visible flags should be used to increase visibility.
- Never ride the ATV on public roads. ATVs are not designed for road use and hard surfaces can increase the risk of an overturn incident.
- Avoid using ATVs while alcohol or drugs are in the bloodstream. In nearly 10 percent of all injuries, and in 30 percent of all fatal ATV incidents, alcohol use was a contributing factor.
- Use personal protective equipment (PPE)—this includes a motorcycle helmet, eye protection, gloves, work boots, and long pants.
- Never exceed the manufacturer’s specified hauling and towing capacity or weight limits. And make sure to secure and balance cargo.

FINAL WORD

Do not let the hype of ATVs blind you from the reality that they pose a danger to your safety if used and operated in a reckless fashion.