

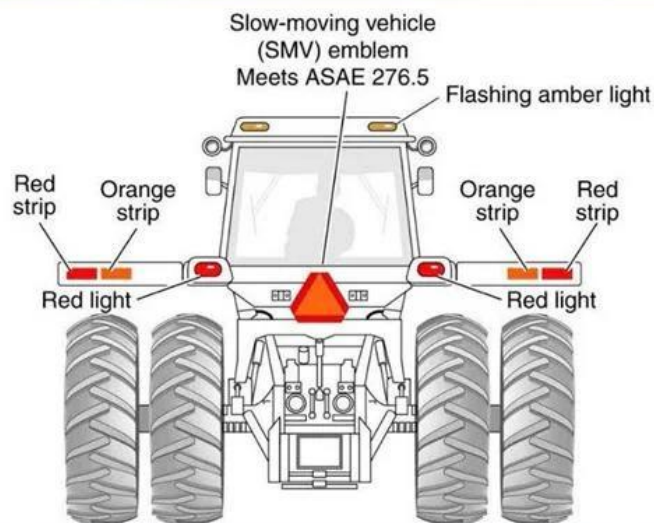
Iowa Farmer Today

Safety Watch: Preventing rural crashes critical amid health crisis

By Brandi Janssen

Apr 13, 2020 **Updated** May 6, 2020

Lighting and Marking Guidelines

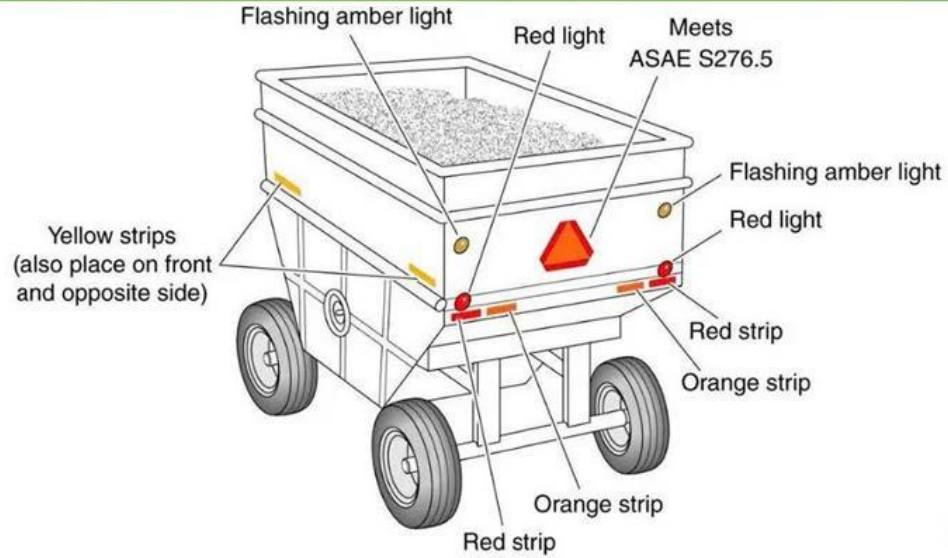


Source: American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers (ASABE) Standards Program, (276.8) 2016

American Society for Agricultural and Biological Engineers standards provide the best lighting and marking guidelines for equipment.

Image courtesy Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health

Lighting and Marking Guidelines



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It seems most people have gotten the message to “stay home and stay put” during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For farmers who have to get into the fields for spring planting no matter what is going on, the current stay-at-home orders and recommendations may spark hope for less trafficked rural roadways.

That may be the case, or it may mean those who are out on rural roads are even more distracted than usual, further increasing the odds of a crash.

For those who need to move farm equipment on public roadways, it is imperative to do your part to reduce the risk of a crash. Given the strain on our health care system because of COVID-19, now is the worst possible time to end up in an emergency department with a traumatic injury that could have been prevented.

Crashes between farm equipment and automobiles remain a persistent problem in rural and suburban areas. Researchers at the Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health analyzed more than 7,000 rural roadway crashes in the upper Midwest to better understand the characteristics associated with these incidents and help all drivers understand how to prevent them.

Although it may seem like a tractor, sprayer or combine should be highly visible, in reality other drivers may not realize how slowly the farm equipment is moving or how to maneuver around it. Rear crashes are common because a motor vehicle driver may not slow down quickly enough when approaching equipment. Increasing equipment visibility with flashing amber lights and reflective tape, especially on the rear of the farm vehicle, can help drivers see it from farther away and provide them with extra time to react and slow down.

It is also common for motor vehicles to strike the left side of equipment while trying to pass. In some cases, the driver does not allow enough passing room and clips the left rear of the farm equipment. In other cases, the auto driver strikes the left side of farm equipment that is turning left into a field lane.

The recommendations of the American Society for Agricultural and Biological Engineers is the gold standard in lighting and marking.

The characteristics of the roadway may also contribute to crashes. Researchers found roadways with wide shoulders had lower rates of crashes than those with narrow or no shoulder. While it may be tempting to drive your farm equipment on the shoulder, make sure you have adequate space to operate. You may not be able to recover the vehicle if a tire edges off the shoulder and into the ditch, causing a rollover. If the shoulder is narrow or uneven, position your equipment in the roadway.

The analysis of the Great Plains Center researchers also found crashes were more likely to occur on straight, flat stretches of road rather than hilly or curvy areas. Drivers may be more alert when navigating curves and hills and be less vigilant on straight, flat stretches.

It is also worth noting the motor vehicle drivers were at fault in the majority of crashes examined by the research team. This may cause those of you who operate farm equipment to wonder why I'm directing this article at you. Unfortunately, the motor vehicle drivers were also more than twice as likely to be injured, and their injuries were typically more severe. Any effort to reduce the risk of a crash is worthwhile.

Agriculture, as an essential business, will continue to operate throughout this crisis. I hope that everyone can be especially vigilant about best safety practices this spring to keep themselves and their neighbors out of the emergency room.

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