

Iowa Farmer Today

Safety Watch: Safety acronym invites farmers to Consider All Risks, in Each situation

By Steph Leonard

Nov 11, 2019 **Updated** Nov 12, 2019



From roadway safety to harvest mishaps, accidents can occur during the most ordinary of daily activities. Motor vehicle incidents and contact with power lines are included among causes of recent Iowa injuries and fatalities.

Photo by Steph Leonard

Accounts of rural accidents, injuries and close calls are peppering the local news media. The following incidents — occurring in Iowa alone during the past two months — are not all-inclusive.

A 63-year-old man fell 15 feet from a roof near Clinton. He was airlifted to University of Iowa hospitals.

A 38-year-old woman rolled her SUV after rear-ending a tractor pulling a gravity wagon near Hopkinton. The tractor's flashing hazard lights and turn signal were activated as it was slowing to make a left turn. No one was injured.

A 24-year-old woman died in a single-vehicle UTV accident near Denison.

A man was ejected and injured when his UTV overturned into Turkey Creek in Cass County.

A combine fire destroyed a combine at a farm near Manchester. No one was hurt.

A 33-year-old Nebraska bow hunter died after his kayak capsized in Harrison County.

A 10-year-old boy died in an ATV crash near Lawton.

A 61-year old man was killed and two boys, ages 6 and 8, were injured when a side-by-side ATV and SUV collided near Primghar.

A man was burned and a livestock trailer caught fire near a LeMars confinement facility when vapors ignited as the man poured gasoline into a running power washer. He was airlifted to Lincoln, Nebraska. Firefighters prevented the fire from spreading to a livestock building.

A 57-year-old Webster City man was killed when a van accidentally struck him as he bicycled near Pierson. The collision occurred near the crest of a hill in early morning “dark conditions.”

A feed truck driver was injured when his truck’s auger contacted overhead power lines near Riverside. The driver, found in downed power lines, was hospitalized; the truck was destroyed.

What’s conspicuous about these incidents over a several- week period is the array of scenarios: from common to unusual; near-misses to fatalities, occurring in work or leisure, and the most ordinary of daily activities to those that are seasonal.

More importantly, many of these accidents are devastating personal and community tragedies. In more (relatively) fortunate cases, they involve injuries that are recoverable or property that can be replaced.

And then there are close calls that don’t make the news, but filter into the local conversations in my neighborhood, and I’m sure in yours, too. A couple examples:

Last summer, the front end of a neighbor’s tractor dropped into a sink hole in a field, leaving him stranded on the seat of a vertically-oriented tractor, in danger of rolling or toppling one way or another and being crushed. Thanks to his cell phone, he was able to call for help.

Each near miss — even those less dramatic — should give one pause.

Just a few days back, something looked a little unusual about my neighbor when I saw him at a meeting. He's a guy who's ordinarily more put-together than I am: tucked in, clean clothes no matter what farm work he's in the thick of.

But this time, the right long sleeve of his shirt hung open with a great tear. Oh! I first thought, I relate to wearing your favorite clothes as long as you can.

Still, this was a little unusual, and someone else noticed, too. He explained the back story:

Before the meeting, he'd "had a brush with the combine." A tree branch went into the corn head and got hung up in the chopper, loosening a bolt holding a fin back at the discharge spreader. When he got out of the cab and went around to clear it, the loosened fin — a sharp blade of steel — was extended out beyond the edge of the spreader and the other fins.

It ripped his sleeve, and had he been an inch or so closer as he rounded the machine, it would easily have put a good slice in his arm.



Some close calls don't make the news, like how a sharp piece of loosened steel at the combine discharge tore a sleeve and could have torn flesh.

Photo by Steph Leonard

It was example of an unexpected, relatively small hazard, he said, but another reminder that you have to pay attention to what's around you.

Downplaying his incident in the context of other harvest observations he's made, he added, "It's the people passing on hills that I'm most worried about."

Another good point.

So what's the take-home message from these examples?

To remind that no matter the amount of experience you have under your belt, you should never shrug off risks. These tragedies show that the price is too high to overlook hazards and misjudge risk.

So...

- Be vigilant in recognizing and respecting the hazards.
- Consider risk — the possibility for harm.
- Ditch the distractions.
- Take more time.

The good news is that safety boils down to a series of choices, made over and over, and that your awareness and attention span can be two of your best tools.

Steph Leonard is an occupational safety manager at the University of Iowa. Contact stephanie-leonard@uiowa.edu.

