Blind corners, harvest machinery hazards

A fatal school bus crash near Blue Hill. Tall corn obscuring intersections. Heavy harvest equipment rolling out on country roads.

District 20 bus drivers are on high alert this time of year.

“At every intersection, you’ve got to stop,” said substitute bus driver and custodian Mitch Golter. “Slowing down is not good enough. You’ve got to see both ways.”

In light of the Sept. 5 bus collision and the beginning of harvest, some changes have been made to insure students are safe.

They include a drop in speed from 45 to 40 mph on country roads and stopping at all signs, according to superintendent Dr. Mike Teahon.

“If there’s no stop sign, they’re supposed to come to a near stop and ease into the intersection,” Teahon said. “With the tall corn, those corners are blind.”

And big trucks, laden with grain, carry more force when entering intersections.

Teahon said gravel piling in the middle of country roads is even more reason to slow down.

The superintendent said he usually has an informal safety talk with bus drivers before school starts.

This year, there was an additional meeting because of the Blue Hill tragedy.

He noted that three types of drivers are on the roads—adults, students and bus drivers.

“We don’t have control over the first two but we do have some control over our bus drivers,” he said. “We want them to be careful.”

With extra stops until corn is harvested, Teahon said route drivers will be behind schedule.

Adjustments have been made such as picking up students earlier in the morning, he said.

“We’d rather they’re late getting to school than the bus not stopping,” Teahon said.

He urged parents to talk to their children about taking extra care when driving in the country this time of year.

District 20 has four bus routes, three on the north side and one south of town.

The farthest pickup, Golter said, is about 18 miles northeast of Gothenburg.

Route parameters, Teahon said, are from Willow Island east to Buttermilk Hill west and north

into Custer County and south of Banner Road.

On average, 75 students ride buses daily. Students are eligible for school bus service if they live four miles or more from the school.

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