

Farm Safety Week a reminder to be cautious on rural roads

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Harvest season is near, and busier rural roads and grim outcomes are likely if precautions are not taken.

Due to concerns about collisions and near collisions between farm equipment and motor vehicles, the 2009 National Farm Safety and Health Week, Sept. 20-26, launches a year-long focus on the theme “Rural Roadway Safety: Alert, Aware and Alive.”

“Harvest is one of the busiest times of year for traffic on rural roads, and consequently we see the number of crashes between motor vehicles and farm equipment peak during this time,” said Murray Madsen, associate director for the Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health.

According to the Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health, based in the University of Iowa College of Public Health, there are on average more than 1,100 crashes between farm equipment and motor vehicles annually in the center’s nine-state region of Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin.

In 2008, Iowa accounted for more than 200 of the 1085 crashes documented by the region’s traffic safety officials. Illinois had the most (249) followed by Iowa, Missouri (186) and Wisconsin (159).

Of the 1,100-plus crashes that occur annually in the Great Plains Center’s region, more than 30% involve nonfatal injuries, and about 2% result in fatalities, according to 2005-08 regional data compiled by the Great Plains Center.

“Rural roadway safety is a concern for farmers and their families and should be a concern for anyone else who could potentially share the road with farm equipment. In fact, motor vehicle operators and passengers are the parties most often injured or killed in these collisions,” said Madsen, who also is the chief trauma investigator for the Iowa Fatality Assessment and Control

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Evaluation project.

Madsen urged “caution, courtesy and patience” from all parties. He stressed that farm equipment should be equipped with all the required and recommended lighting and markings in place and in working order.

Road lights should be in use day and night. Additionally, motorists should be alert for farm equipment, he said. Farm equipment often stops and makes wide, unexpected turns and may be traveling at a fraction of the speed of a motor vehicle.

“Farmers and motorists together can contribute to a safer harvest season on the nearly 900,000 miles of rural roads that crisscross our center’s nine-state region,” Madsen said.