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Harvest Safety and Health Awareness

Every farmer has sacrificed safety because of inconvenience or to save time. If you think that's not you, when did you last use the seatbelt on a tractor? You set the safety example for family and employees to follow. Your life is too important to take unnecessary risks. With harvest underway, it is important to have a meeting with your family and employees about the safety rules you require to be followed this harvest season. If you have never thought of safety as rules to follow, or had a serious safety discussion with your team, make that a goal for the coming week.

Inside the cab of a machine operating in a field is the safest place you will be all day. When you step off to make repairs, adjustments, or attach the header, is when the danger level rises. The most important step is to shut the engine off if anything you are doing outside the cab requires you to be in contact with the machine. Cylinder locks are for more than winter storage. Always lock cylinders in position if you have to be under a suspended load. If cylinder locks aren't available, figure out a safe way to be under it. We put our lives in the trust of hydraulic hoses and cylinders far too often.

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Grain storage facilities are possibly the most dangerous sites during harvest season.

Always be cautious around running augers, shafts, and moving grain. Keep hearing protection and climbing harnesses on location, and never enter a grain bin without a second person on site and in contact.

This year's National Farm Safety and Health Week, September 21-27, stresses the importance of rural road safety. Narrow roads, heavy loads, and blind hills seem to always result in an accident. There is a lot more traffic on our rural roads, and many drivers are not familiar with the size, weight, and stopping ability of farm equipment and trucks. Tractors and combines are slow. A car moving at 55 mph can pass a tractor moving 15 mph in about five seconds. Turn on your lights and flashers to warn motorists, always wear your seatbelt, and stay off the phone.

Each year, an accident has to occur between farm machinery and a passenger car before motorists and farmers remember that the highway is a dangerous place to be, and an accident can happen when we least expect it. The fall harvest months bring out much more machinery than normal when heavy, slow grain trucks and tractor-trailers are included in the numbers.

The cause of most accidents is impatience and distractions. These can come from both motorists and farmers. Travel any road out from Owensboro on a weekday between 7:30 and 8:00 a.m. and you will likely have to brake for an oncoming car in your lane passing a vehicle. Same story, different direction between 5:30 and 6:30 in the afternoon.

Farmers can be impatient as well. Many roads in Daviess County are narrow with blind curves and hills. Getting the combine moved to the next job is important, but wait until there is a vehicle in front to warn oncoming traffic about the width of your oncoming vehicle.

In addition to the occupational safety risks of farming, there are the physical risks to your body. This season has been stressful with flooding, low grain prices, late planting, low

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grain prices, high input costs, low grain prices, dry weather, and low grain prices. We're entering the second year of expected negative income margins in grain production, and low yields are expected for a large percentage of corn and soybean acres. This is not going to be easy for farms and families to overcome. There will certainly be stress and difficult decisions over the next few months. If you feel stress overtaking your ability to manage your farm and family, call your doctor or 988 to speak with a professional. There is help to overcome the physical effects on your body of the challenges listed above.

It is vital that you practice safety and care for your physical health. Doing so not only protects you from harm but also sets a good example for your family and your employees.

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