

The race is on, only these vehicles are moving less than 25 mph

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Unlike race cars that travel at speeds greater than 200 miles per hour racing for victory, farmers are racing to get their crops planted - but at a much slower pace.

As farmers move their equipment to and from fields, motorists need to be aware that slow-moving vehicles are on the road and traveling half the speed, said a Purdue University expert. Tractors and other farm equipment often weigh between 20,000 to 40,000 pounds and are two to three times the height of regular automobiles.

This combination of farmers and motorists racing to their destination at the same time can be devastating, studies show. Collisions involving farm equipment occur at a rate of about 8,000 per year, according to the National Safety Council. Data also show that collisions with farm vehicles are five times more likely to result in a fatality than any other type of motor vehicle accident.

"Be patient and slow down," said Bill Field, Purdue Cooperative Extension Service safety specialist. "Speed is the answer for everything these days, and that creates a problem when we start mixing our fast-paced routines with travel on rural roadways."

A group of experts teamed up to produce an educational DVD, "We All Share the Road," to educate drivers about the hazards of farm machinery and equipment traveling on roadways. Partners were Purdue Extension, Indiana Farm Bureau, the Indiana Farm Bureau Women's Group, Lake County Farm Bureau and the Indiana State Police.

Experts in the video caution drivers to:

- * **Be aware** - Rural roads are heavily populated by farm equipment in the spring for planting and the fall for harvest.
- * **Slow down** - At top speed, farm machinery moves at about 25 mph, which makes it easy for cars to come up on them quickly and unexpectedly.
- * **Keep your distance** - Drivers should keep three seconds' distance from any vehicle in front of them.
- * **Pass with care** - Pass only on straightaways with good visibility and make sure the tractor is not swinging wide to make a left turn.
- * **Be patient** - In heavy traffic, the farmer is expected to pull over and let groups pass.

"Roadway conditions do not always allow the driver of farm equipment to pull over immediately, but they will do so when it is safe," said Isabella Chism, second vice president of Indiana Farm Bureau. "If drivers stay aware and are patient, we'll all get to work safely, whether work is in an office or a field."

"State law indicates that any vehicle used in agriculture traveling less than 25 miles per hour is classified as a slow-moving vehicle," Field said. "Slow-moving vehicles are to be identified with a triangular red and orange sign mounted on the rear of the machine."

Slow-moving vehicles found in Indiana can range from a tractor to a sprayer, and from towed implements, such as manure spreaders, to self-propelled machines like tomato-harvesters and combines.

Field said that many farmers don't realize the slow-moving vehicle emblems on their machines may be hard to see because they are easily damaged and fade after a few years.

"They need to be replaced like many other maintenance items on a tractor," Field said.

Not only do farmers have a responsibility to help make roadways safe, but motorists do as well, he said.

"Even when the race is not on, motorists still need to be aware of roadway obstructions such as large farm machinery or horse-drawn equipment and slow down when passing through an agricultural or Amish community," Field said.

Source: Purdue University

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