



Safety Up – On Tractors

Tractors today are the safest they've ever been. But they are still the leading cause of farm fatalities across Canada.

Avoid tractor-related injuries and fatalities by taking responsibility for your own safety. Being safe involves removing the unnecessary risks and effectively managing the rest. You need to get trained before you get to work, stay alert for potential hazards while on the job, and learn how to manage the hazards you can't avoid.

Know the job. Know the hazards. Know the drill.

Training – who needs it?

Know the job. Get trained for each task before you start doing it. Learn to operate a tractor in a large level field. Drive only the tractor at first, then practise with equipment attached. Ask your trainer to demonstrate all procedures ahead of time. Move gradually from simple to complex jobs. Ask questions. And remember: it is illegal for anyone under 16 or without a licence to drive on public roads.

Take it on safely

Know the hazards. You take on many tasks in a day. Slow down and think about the hazards associated with each new task. The nasty truth is that a tractor hitched to a farm implement can have many tricks up its sleeve. You could be cut, crushed, pulled in, wrapped, struck or run over. Many extreme danger points are associated with the hitch or with the implement rather than the tractor itself. Wherever they are found, these hazards need to be avoided. Here are some specific hazards to watch for while operating a tractor.

1. **Hitch with care.** Set hitches low – preferably 17 inches high, but never above 21 inches high. Hitch to the drawbar, never the axle. Use proper safety clips and pins, and never leave loose chain dangling. Watch for crush hazards while hitching. When you pull a load, take up slack slowly. Don't jerk on chains or cables.
2. **Prevent rollovers.** Some manoeuvres increase the likelihood of a rollover, such as carrying raised objects, operating with a front-end loader, or operating on a steep incline. To prevent one: don't operate near ditches or embankments; drive straight down slopes; keep wheels set as wide as possible; and reduce speed in turns, on slopes or on rough, slick or muddy surfaces.

ROPS – the Rollover Protection System on your tractor does not work without a seatbelt! In a rollover situation, the seatbelt keeps you under the protection of the ROPS. Use it.

3. **Big tractors, bigger concern.** Giant four-wheel tractors can be tough to navigate through tight places. Overhead clearance may also be a concern. Be extra cautious. Take time to get used to all-wheel steering. Ensure everyone is well clear before starting the engine. Avoid steep slopes and, since big tractors can't stop as quickly, drive slowly.

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4. **Service regularly.** Tractors need regular service. Check lubrication, fuel and water levels often. To perform adjustments or maintenance, be sure the engine is shut off and the implement is not moving.
5. **Refuel without fire.** Refuelling can result in fire or explosion. Before you start, turn the engine off and allow it to cool. Don't smoke. Remember that it takes longer to fill big tanks, so find a secure, comfortable position from which to refuel.
6. **Keep the cab chemical-free.** Remove soiled personal protective equipment (PPE) before entering, and clean off contaminated footwear. Don't hold the steering wheel with gloves worn while handling chemicals. To remove grime and possible chemical contamination, clean the inside of the tractor regularly with a grease-cutting agent.

Check and double check

Know the drill. Recognizing hazards is a good starting point. But to prevent injury, you need to know how to manage or avoid them. Here's a checklist to help you manage hazards so you can stay safe before, during and after your trip.

- Read the operator's manual and follow all recommendations.
- Ensure there is a first-aid kit and fire extinguisher mounted on the tractor.
- Always circle-check before you start. Check visibility, lights, tires, and brakes. Ensure the exhaust system is in good condition and leak-free.
- All shields and guards should be safely in place.
- Lock brake pedals together before travelling on roadways.
- Set wheel treads as wide as possible, and ensure tires are properly inflated.
- Use safety hitch pins and chains when towing equipment.
- Keep steps free of mud, ice, tools or debris that could cause slips.
- Use the seatbelt and adjust mirrors before you start the engine.
- Follow traffic rules.
- Get a good sleep and take breaks. Don't let fatigue or carelessness affect your work.

- Wear hearing protection if the tractor does not have a soundproof cab.
- On a downhill, keep the tractor in gear so the engine can serve as a brake.
- Don't operate a tractor in buildings without adequate ventilation.
- Hitch towed loads no higher than the drawbar.
- Check overhead clearance when towing high loads.
- After you work, park safely. Disengage the power take-off (PTO) and lower equipment to the ground. Turn off the engine and pull the key. Ensure the transmission is in neutral or park and the brake is set.

Watch your back

An idling tractor could slip into gear or begin rolling if it's in neutral or the park brake malfunctions. Never jump from a moving tractor or turn your back on it while it is running.

The last word

Tractors are a valuable tool to power field work. They are effective implement carriers, transport units and remote power sources. But they can be dangerous if they are used incorrectly. Your safety is your responsibility. Get trained, recognize hazards, and manage them for your own good.

References

Farm Safety Association Inc., Guelph, ON.

Farm Tractor Safety Checklist, PEI Farm Health and Safety Website,
www.peifa.ca/farmsafety/officers/check.html

Tractor Safety, Saskatchewan Labour
<http://www.labour.gov.sk.ca/safety/tractor.html>