All terrain vehicle safety talk

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| All-terrain vehicles (ATV) are becoming more common and useful to farmers due to their ease of use and the functionality they provide. Yet, as they become more widely used in this capacity, ATV related injuries and fatalities have followed with an upward trend. It is essential to follow safe practices and manufacturer safety guidelines.*One of the most common types of ATVs are four-wheelers. While this type of vehicle is an incredible tool on a farm, they have many design features that do not lend themselves toward the safety of the rider*: * First and foremost is the absence of a cab or any type of rollover protection system, which includes not having any type of safety harness.
* Compounding this lack of rollover protection is the vehicle’s short and narrow wheelbase. The small wheelbase of a four-wheeler increases the ease at which the vehicle can flip or rollover. For this reason, the operator must take caution when maneuvering the vehicle at high speeds or when turning sharply, especially on rough or steep terrain.
* Further, a common practice that is against most manufacturer recommendations is allowing other passengers to ride on the four-wheeler. Commonly, passengers ride on the seat directly behind the driver and even sometimes on the front or back utility racks. This is a practice that should be highly discouraged unless the ATV is specifically designed for such use.

Another popular type of all-terrain vehicle are side-by-side ATVs such as a Polaris Ranger or RZR. These ATVs are quite a bit larger and more powerful than a four-wheeler and allow for passengers to be carried in additional seats. These types of ATVs are inherently safer than other ATVs due to the integrated rollover protective structure. These structures are only beneficial if they are used in conjunction with a seatbelt or safety harness. Seatbelts should be worn any time the side-by-side is driven.*Personal protective equipment (PPE) is a key safety precaution for use with any ATV, especially four-wheelers:** Among the recommended PPE are helmets. The most protective are full-face which protect the head, face, chin and mouth from impact should a rider fall or be thrown from an ATV.
* Just as important, eye protection such as simple safety glasses or full riding goggles protect the operator’s eyes from injury. Being hit by an object such as a bug, rock or branch at almost any speed can cause serious injury including blindness.
* Footwear is another important PPE, as the proper footwear should be worn to prevent the feet from slipping on the footrests and incidentally contacting the ground. Further, be aware of loose laces that may get caught on rotating parts causing entrapment.

In most states, the use of ATVs is illegal on highways and roads. One exception to this rule is if the ATV is used for agricultural purposes. However, the reasoning behind why they are illegal under most circumstances is sound logic. An ATV cannot protect an operator in a collision with a motor vehicle, even if the rider is wearing protective gear. Incidents on highways are one of the leading factors for ATV related deaths. Lastly, as with any vehicle, alcohol should be avoided when operating an ATV. As employers, it is recommended employees never be allowed to consume alcohol while at work, especially if they might operate machinery.  |

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