

Safe Use of All-Terrain Vehicles

All-terrain vehicles (ATVs) have evolved from weekend recreation use to everyday "workhorses." But the high number of ATV-related deaths and disabling injuries every year leads to their poor safety record. The danger stems from their basic design, power, and speed potential, combined with modifications and frequent use over rough terrain.

TRUE STORY

An irrigator was driving fast on a dirt road on a dairy farm when an insect flew into his eye. Temporarily blinded, the driver veered off the road and collided with a parked windrower, breaking his thigh, knee, and ankle.

What could have prevented this accident?

- Wear goggles.
- Slow down.
- Park equipment away from the edge of the road.

THE RISKS OF ATVs

You can buy ATVs with different power and speed characteristics. Many are capable of speeds in excess of what's required for farm work. To minimize the risks of using ATVs on a farm:

- Limit speed to below 25 m.p.h. Excessive speed over rough terrain invites disaster.
- If you make modifications to an ATV that change the weight distribution, the safety of the vehicle may be compromised. Before any changes of this nature are made, the manufacturer should be contacted.
- Avoid towing excessive weight, mounting tall or heavy implements, or making other performance alterations.
- Maintain the vehicle properly. Ensure adequate guarding for hot engine parts, exhaust, drive shafts, chains, and sprockets. Also, check spark arrester.
- Increase visibility. ATVs can be hard to see. Lights, reflectors, and flags on whips can improve their visibility.

EMPLOYER/EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES

Employer:

- Purchase ATVs designed for work, such as heavy, 4-wheel design with conservative power-to-weight ratio.

- Limit modifications to those approved by the ATV manufacturer. Avoid excessively high or heavy modifications.
- Require all new drivers to receive training in ATV operation safety.
- Maintain the ATV as suggested by the manufacturer and keep all guards and shields in place.
- Assure lights and reflectors are in place. Consider adding flags on whip antennas for daytime visibility. If the vehicle is used during nighttime, head and tail lights should be in proper working order.
- Prohibit children from driving or riding on ATVs.

Employee:

- Know how to operate an ATV safely, especially if it's your first time driving it. If you have questions, ask your supervisor for training.
- Avoid drugs and alcohol at work. Many prescription drugs can cause drowsiness.
- Wear over-the-ankle work shoes, close-fitting clothing, and approved helmets and eye protection while driving.
- Operate the ATV at slow speed--and always below 25 m.p.h.
- Report any mechanical problems to your supervisor promptly..
- Avoid public roadways. ATVs are designed for off-road use.
- Never allow extra riders on ATVs.

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