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Harvest Safety Tips

Harvest has started in spots across the Meadowlark Extension District. It signifies both the conclusion of a growing season and the start of a very busy time for producers trying to get crops out of the field in a timely manner. Unfortunately, it can become a dangerous time as well.

Injury prevention features on modern equipment are better than ever, but not failproof. Whether you're in the operator's seat or working nearby, give equipment a wide berth, paying particular attention to augers and power take off shafts. Combine snapping rolls for example, pull stalks in at a rate of 12 feet per second – much faster than you can react to pull away. Avoid any moving/rotating equipment until the machine is shut off and can be safely approached.

Be aware of fire hazards as well. Residue buildup around engine/exhaust systems and concealed drive belts/pulleys can cause friction resulting in fires. Regular equipment cleaning and electrical system checks are vital tasks to help prevent potential issues. When possible, start harvesting on the downwind side of fields. If a fire does occur, flames will hopefully move towards harvested portions of the field, reducing potential damage.

Safety equipment should consist of a cell phone, first aid kit, and fire extinguisher. Make sure fire extinguishers are properly charged and cell phones can be recharged through the day. If you have poor cell phone coverage areas, take extra care to share your harvest plans - including physical location - with your harvest crew and other family members. It can save a lot of precious response time later if someone needs to get you – but you can't communicate.

A vehicle traveling 65 miles per hour approaching a combine traveling 15 miles per hour will cover and catch that combine in less than 20 seconds. Operators should be aware of fast approaching vehicles, making sure equipment hazard lighting is clean and in working order. Look ahead for 'emergency exits', giving yourself a place to go when an approaching vehicle doesn't keep a safe distance. When following equipment or semis, give equipment and yourself plenty of room. Pass only when safe to do so and be aware of vehicles entering and exiting the roadway to prevent approaching too quickly.

Whether we like to hear it or not, it's good to stop now and again to stretch and move around. It's not wrong either, to get some 'time away' to refocus and get a break from harvest stresses? Carve out time to slow down and refresh. The marathon of harvest can feel like a sprint, but it will be much worse if you or others are injured because of physical or mental fatigue.

Harvest is an awesome time. Plan now to make sure it starts *and* finishes that way.