

News Article

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Share the road during spring planting season

It's about that time – large farm equipment will soon be traveling local roads for spring soil preparation and planting season. As a driver, it is easy to get frustrated when caught behind something going less than 25 miles per hour, but try to take a breath and be patient. Your life, and the lives of others, may depend on it.

"There is a shared responsibility for making sure our roadways remain safe," said Bill Field, professor of agricultural and biological engineering at Purdue. "There are certain times of year when farm vehicles will be more prevalent, such as spring planting and fall harvest, and motorists need to recognize that and exercise patience."

Field said modern farm vehicles have more safety equipment than previous models, including better lighting, but the individual vehicles are much larger and pose a greater danger in a collision. Tractors, planters, sprayers and other farm equipment can be two to three times the height of passenger vehicles, weigh up to 40,000 pounds, and take up more than a lane of a traffic.

Drivers should keep in mind that farmers cannot always safely pull over to let others pass, due to road signs, side ditches, the physical nature what they are transporting, and other hazards. Conversely, farmers should be courteous and pull over to let others pass when it is safe to do so.

One thing that every new Indiana driver learns about in their driver's manual is the meaning of Slow Moving Vehicle (SMV) emblems displayed on farm equipment and other vehicles. An SMV emblem is a triangle shape, with an orange fluorescent center and red reflective borders. Equipment and other vehicles displaying this emblem are capable of speeds no faster than 25 miles per hour. Driving at road speed, the gap between you and the equipment will close quickly, so immediate caution and slower speeds are prudent.

This becomes very important, in fact a matter of life and death, as it refers to our Amish neighbors in northern Indiana transporting people in horse-drawn buggies and other slow-moving vehicles year-round.

Most farmers have had some significant days in the farm shop to get equipment ready. However, I'd urge farmers to recheck the condition of SMV emblems to make sure they are still fluorescent. Over time, these emblems can fade and become less noticeable. When I was growing up on the farm, I think we had some emblems that we had kept around for 20+ years. It was still a triangle, but it wasn't very reflective.

Other road-related safety equipment, such as headlights, taillights, flashing lights, hitch pins, tires, and wheel bearings also should be checked.

Lastly, large equipment should be fully folded to transport position for the safety of the farmer and other drivers when moving from field to field over the road.

Safety is always an important consideration, whether at home, on the road, or on the farm. Take time to be safe and share the road this spring.

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