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PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ON OR OFF-ROAD, YOUTH BENEFIT FROM TRACTOR SAFETY TRAINING

Tony Nye says he went from “9 to 29” the day he ran over his father with a tractor.

Farming is among the most dangerous of occupations in the United States, with a fatality rate 800% higher than the average American worker. That’s one of the reasons Tony Nye, Ohio State University Clinton County Extension Educator, teaches tractor safety in his County. The other reason is more personal.

“I was nine years old when my Dad, my grandfather and I were cleaning our livestock barns,” Nye says. “My job was to drive one of our tractors pulling the manure spreader back up to the barn so Dad could fill it again. When I pulled up to the barn, Dad didn’t like where I was parked. He decided to climb onto the tractor to tell me where I should stop it.”

Because Tony was inside the tractor cab, he didn’t realize that his father had slipped on the tractor steps and fallen. When Tony stopped the tractor and climbed down, all he could see of his father was his head and arms. The rest of his body was pinned under the tractor’s rear wheel.

“Dad was still able to talk and told me I was the man of the house now,” Tony says. “I panicked and couldn’t even start the tractor to move it off from him. Fortunately, Grandpa was close and he came to help. Dad was in the hospital a long time after the accident, but he did recover. For a long time, I blamed myself for the accident. But there were a number of risky things we did that day.”

Climbing onto a moving tractor is never a good idea. Tractors can be replaced. People can’t. It’s also important to recognize that while youth may have the physical stature necessary to drive a tractor, they often don’t have the necessary maturity to react responsibly in this kind of crisis.

“Things turned out well for us in spite of that tragedy,” Tony says. “But I know there were still times after that when we took risks with our tractors. We shouldn’t have.”

Tony, now a tractor safety instructor, works diligently with high school youth in his County to help them learn about the seriousness of safely operating tractors. Sharing his personal experience during his classes usually causes the teens to recognize how quickly a tractor’s power and size can become life threatening.

“You have to respect both the machine and the person on the machine,” Tony says. “Many of the youth I work with don’t live on a farm. Some don’t have a driver’s license yet. I know there are literally hundreds of kids around the age of 15 who are operating tractors. It’s critical to evaluate the type of situation they’re working in and what the consequences could be if an accident occurs. I probably went from 9 to 29 the day I ran over my Dad. I had to grow up fast, not being sure my Dad would even come home from the hospital. It doesn’t mean I didn’t have a good childhood, but from that point on I took things much more seriously than my peers.”

Tractors account for approximately half of all farm-related fatalities and tractor overturns still claim too many lives each year. Approximately 80% of rollover deaths happen to experienced farmers and many farms that suffer a tractor overturn fatality go out of business within one year. Statistics also show that one in seven farmers involved in a tractor overturn is permanently disabled.

Nationwide Insurance Professor of Agricultural Safety and Health and Extension Safety Specialist Dr. Dennis Murphy at PennState’s Department of Agricultural and Biological Engineering knows two simple devices can dramatically reduce a farmer’s chances of being injured or killed in a rollover accident: roll over protection systems (ROPS) and seatbelts.

Studies have shown that ROPS and seatbelts almost entirely prevent deaths and serious injuries in tractor overturns.

“Side and rear overturns are the most frequent cause of tractor-related deaths,” Murphy says. “ROPS are designed to create a protective zone around the operator when a rollover occurs. When used with a seat belt, the ROPS will prevent the operator from being thrown from the protective zone and crushed from an overturning tractor or from equipment mounted or hooked to the tractor.”

On older model tractors, operators should make sure all guards, power-take-off (PTO) shields and other protective features are intact and operable. Testing the tractor’s features before operating it is essential in operating any model tractor.

“No matter how many safety features a tractor may have, there is no substitute for a trained tractor operator who is aware of the potential hazards associated with operating a tractor,”

Murphy says. "If the tractor is older, it's critical to make sure if things like the brakes actually work."

Tractor operators should be both physically able to operate a tractor and mature enough to avoid a risky situation and emotionally mature enough to appropriately respond to a sudden crisis.

"All operators should be able to reach all the tractor's controls, hear and see what's happening around them and know what action to take if a crisis develops," Murphy says. "Don't overlook the need for a fire extinguisher, first aid kit and other emergency supplies. Unless there's more than one seat on the tractor, it's never safe to have an extra passenger on a tractor.

"The worst thing that can happen to a tractor owner is that they take a risk and get by with it," Murphy adds. "The more times you take the risk, the more likely it is that you'll end up the loser."

Tractor safety training events are available through Extension offices across the nation. Numerous online resources are also available, including www.extension.psu.edu and the National Agricultural Tractor Safety Initiative at www.nasdonline.org.