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PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DO YOU RECOGNIZE THIS COMMON DANGER?

When not operated properly, ATVs could be deadly.

In 2022, the U. S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) reported that they were “aware of 2,211 deaths associated with off-highway vehicles” between 2016 and 2018. Of that 2,211, 1,591 were all-terrain vehicles (ATVs).

Curt Porterfield, Virginia Tech Health and Safety Training Coordinator, advises that all ATV riders understand the hazards associated with use of an ATV or UTV, evaluate their risk when using ATVs in farming activity, control that risk by following ATV operation safe practices, and use appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) whenever operating an ATV.

“ATVs are one of the most common and most dangerous pieces of equipment on today’s farm,” Porterfield says. “Every year, an average of 500 people die and another 100,000 are seriously injured while operating an ATV.”

In the southwest United States, ATV-related injuries and deaths increased nearly 30% since 2021. Statistics from those incidents reveal that an average hospital stay for an ATV-related injury averages 7.5 days. The average cost of the hospital stay is \$127,000 or more.

“Another statistic from these accidents shows that only 10.3% of the adults involved were wearing a helmet,” Porterfield says. “Just wearing a helmet and the other appropriate PPE is crucial to safely operating an ATV.”

Porterfield, who is also a beef producer, knows that it’s natural for children to want to do what their parents do on the farm. On many farm operations, that includes using an ATV.

“Children make up about 33% of patients who are injured while operating an ATV,” he says. “It’s so enticing for children to demonstrate how grown up they are by helping with farm activities. It’s equally easy for parents to agree to having them jump on the ATV to check cattle

or go get some water while you're harvesting. It's easy to forget that operating that ATV puts them at risk."

Full-sized ATVs are restricted for sale to those 16 years of age and older and should only be used by those who are 16 and older. There are many youths-sized ATVs on the market. These smaller and slower ATVs reduce the risk of crushing but still pose a significant risk for injuries and fatalities if not used properly.

Porterfield points out that every state has laws regarding ATV use. Knowing and respecting them can result in saving a life. Laws may require registering or titling an ATV, possessing liability insurance, limiting where you can ride, requiring lights and other accessories, etc. Laws for each state can be found at www.atvsafety.org.

Among the safety practices that apply to all ATV riders include getting hands-on training from a qualified instructor. Manufacturers or dealers may offer training materials. Most ATVs are designed for one rider. Operators should never allow more passengers than there are seats.

"Most ATVs are designed for the operator only," Porterfield says. "The driver must balance the machine by shifting their bodyweight as necessary during the ride. Most ATVs don't feature a crush-protective-system which would protect any rider from being crushed by the machine."

These systems are becoming more popular and are now required on ATVs sold in Australia.

More and more, ATVs are used in farm environments to haul things such as bales, wood, fencing posts, etc. While the vehicles are convenient ways to transport such items, operators should be aware that exceeding ATV weight limits significantly increases potential for injury.

"Safely operating an ATV largely depends on operator behavior," Porterfield says. "ATV stability depends on maintaining center of gravity (COG). A heavy load will shift that center. Operators should keep in mind that manufacturers may limit the types of accessories that can be used with an ATV. Just because someone manufactures a sprayer for an ATV that doesn't mean your manufacturer allows it."

When it comes to accessories, adding an after-market feature to an ATV may seriously increase risk of rollovers and other ATV incidents because the machine was not designed to operate with the added weight.

"Speed is often involved in ATV injuries," Porterfield says. "That is especially true when an ATV is overloaded or carrying an unbalanced load."

ATV tires are designed to provide increased grip on dirt roads. Those same tires, on a paved road, are prone to grip the road too much, leading to overturns, especially when recommended speeds are exceeded.

"If an operator doesn't wear a helmet, there's no protection for the skull if a machine overturns," Porterfield says. "The hardness of a watermelon is similar to the hardness of our skull. It doesn't take much force to burst a watermelon."

Terrain hazards around the farm include holes, ruts, tree stumps, large rocks, etc. Hilly terrain is often involved with ATV rollovers. In hilly areas, COG can quickly shift, leading to a rollover.

"If you have to travel across a hilly area, it's better to go sideways than straight up the slope," Porterfield says. "During training, learn how to operate an ATV in different terrain conditions. If you're traveling on muddy or snowy roads or areas, the ATV will respond differently to those conditions than a dry terrain."

Any time a load is carried across rugged terrain, operators should be prepared to give extra attention to maintaining COG. Anytime an ATV rollover occurs, the risk of asphyxiation of the operator is a valid concern.

“The operator must be able to make quick body weight shifts combined with acceleration or braking as necessary,” Porterfield says. “Active riding means a rider has the necessary skills to effectively steer and control the ATV. The only way to know how it handles and feels is to practice in a controlled situation. Being prepared for unexpected hazards and ready to react appropriately is key to staying safe.”

Appropriate ATV helmets are those offered by or recommended by ATV dealers. Bicycle helmets don’t provide adequate protection. Riders should always wear long pants and a long-sleeved shirt. Ankle boots, gloves and eye/face protection are also on the PPE list.

“And don’t work alone with your ATV,” Porterfield says. “If you must operate the ATV in an isolated area, make sure someone knows when to expect your return and knows the route you’re taking. If weather conditions are threatening, have a plan to find shelter.”

Find ATV safety videos and resources at <https://atvsafety.org/atv-ecourse/>
<https://www.unmc.edu/publichealth/cscash/resources>.

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