

Know your surroundings when operating farm equipment

Tractor incidents are a leading source of farm injuries. Many incidents occur due to people, obstacles, or hazards in the work area that operators did not see. Safe operation requires constant awareness, especially near homes, buildings, animals, and high-traffic areas.

Key hazards and awareness tips

People and bystanders

- Look for coworkers, visitors, or bystanders before starting or moving equipment
- Use eye contact or hand signals when someone is nearby; stop if you lose sight of them
- Never assume others know where you're going or that they can see you

Children

- Children may unexpectedly enter work areas and are at high risk
- Keep equipment and operation areas child-free

Animals

- Keep livestock and pets away from equipment paths — animals can move unpredictably or be hidden from view

Buildings, homes, and yards

- Slow down near barns, houses, garages, and blind corners — people and animals may emerge suddenly
- Be especially alert when operating near driveways, pens, and feed areas

Overhead power lines

- Look up before raising loaders, augers, or tall equipment
- Be aware of overhead power lines anytime you move or operate equipment

Ditches, holes, and uneven ground

- Avoid or use extreme caution near ditches, embankments, and holes as they create sudden hazards for equipment and operators
- Scan ahead for washouts, gullies, and soft spots

Low visibility and weather

- Avoid operating in bad weather or low light whenever possible — hazards and people are harder to see
- Use lights, mirrors, and SMV (slow moving vehicle) emblems to stay visible

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Safe operating practices

- Do a 360° walk-around before moving equipment to check for people, pets, animals, and obstacles
- Use the correct platform to mount/dismount — never jump off equipment
- Shut down equipment completely before climbing down
- No extra riders unless proper seating and belts are provided
- Keep mirrors clean and adjusted to see as much of the area around you as possible
- Avoid distractions — no phones or multitasking near moving equipment

Final reminders

- Pause, look around, and make sure the area is clear
- A few seconds of awareness can prevent a life-changing incident

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