Ten Keys To TRACTOR SAFETY

Regardless of how much research and expense Massey Ferguson product engineers invest in making tractors as free of hazards as they are practical, such efforts don't guarantee that the tractors on your farm are used as they were designed to be used.

"The responsibility for ensuring that tractors and other farm equipment are as safe as they can be rests with both manufacturers and customers," notes Tony Fox, an AGCO product safety engineer.

"The safety features on a tractor should be maintained, just like all other components," he explains.

Chuck Brundage, another member of AGCO's product safety engineering team, adds that it's up to the customer to make sure his tractor is properly configured for the jobs at hand. "For example, a user has to adjust front and rear weights to match the usage demanded by the job," notes Brundage. "A front-end loader, for instance, moves a tractor's center of gravity forward and upward, creating the need for rear-wheel weights or ballast to enhance stability."

AGCO product safety engineer Earle Morton says the winter off-season is an excellent time to conduct a safety review of tractors. "Generally, there's more time to thoroughly inspect each tractor since there is less need for operating tractors in the field," he says.

The following checklist provides a common-sense guideline for conducting a tractor-safety inspection:

1 **ROPS and seatbelt**–Every tractor should have a rollover protective structure—either a rollbar on an open tractor or a cab with a built-in ROPS. A seatbelt is also a must. Other than practicing correct operating procedures, proper use of a ROPS and wearing a seatbelt are the most important things you can do to ensure that you don't become a farm-fatality statistic.

2 **PTO shields**–The PTO shaft, as well as all U-joints and shafts on all implements, should be shielded. Also, replace damaged or missing shields.

3 **Lighting, marking and SMV emblem**–A slow-moving vehicle emblem and visible lighting and markings should be mounted properly in place on the tractor. Clean or replace as necessary to ensure that the emblem is clearly visible and undamaged. And make sure lighting is in place and not obscured by loads.

4 **Weights**–Review the tractor's usage, and make sure you have the rear-wheel and front-end weights that you can mount when needed. Use front-end weights for counter-balancing heavy, rear-mounted loads, as well as towed loads in hilly country, to reduce the risk of backward overturns. Have rear-wheel weights or ballast available to add stability for front loads.

5 **Hitches**–Check hitches for damage; repair, if needed. Make sure safety chains are in place and undamaged.

6 **Operating systems**–Check steering, braking and neutral-start systems, gauges and lights to make sure all are working properly.

7 **Steps and platform**–Make sure all steps are in place and not damaged. Remove tools or other debris on or around the operator's platform or steps.

8 **Fire extinguisher**–Equip every tractor with a multi-use (ABC) fire extinguisher, and check it regularly to ensure that it's in proper working order.

9 **First-aid kit**–The cost of a general-purpose first-aid kit is small compared with the potential benefit of having it available when needed. Once in place, inspect the kit regularly to ensure that it's complete.

10 **Operator's manual**–Require every tractor operator to review all safety guidelines in the manual before first driving the tractor and at regular intervals thereafter.