

University of Iowa News Release

Midwest Leaders Working to Improve Safety on Rural Roadways

The idyllic and peaceful country roads commonly associated with rural America can, in fact, be hazardous routes for motorists and farm equipment operators alike.

Due to concerns about collisions and near collisions between farm equipment and motor vehicles, the 2009 National Farm Safety and Health Week, Sept. 20-26, launches a year-long focus on the theme “Rural Roadway Safety: Alert, Aware and Alive.”

Nationally, the U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration’s Fatality Analysis Reporting System documented an average of 94 fatal crashes annually between farm equipment and motor vehicles in 2003-2007 data for the United States.

According to the Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health, based in the University of Iowa College of Public Health, there are more than 1,100 farm equipment/vehicle crashes annually in the center’s nine-state region of Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. More than 350 of these crashes involve nonfatal injuries and 22 resulted in fatalities, according to 2003-2007 regional data compiled by the Great Plains Center.

“While many of the deaths and a small fraction of the injuries associated with farm machinery are reported in the media, what we see in press clippings is motor vehicle collisions with farm equipment accounting for 10 percent of the machinery-related fatality reports and nearly half of the non-fatal machinery incident stories,” said Murray Madsen, associate director for the Great Plains Center and chief trauma investigator for the Iowa Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation project.

“This should be a concern for farmers, their families, and anyone else who could potentially share the road with farm equipment. In fact, motor vehicle operators and passengers are the parties most often injured or killed in these collisions.”

At the recommendation of its regional advisory committee, the Great Plains Center hosted a first-of-its-kind conference in Des Moines on March 17-18, 2009, called the “Farm Equipment/Motor Vehicle Crash Prevention Conference”. It convened more than fifty invitation-only participants representing 13 states.

Together the participants – including farmers, law enforcement, state transportation departments, safety and medical personnel, and others – produced recommendations and drafted state-based action plans to reduce crashes between farm equipment and motor vehicles.

“The conference allowed a diverse group of concerned individuals to come together to make a difference in rural roadway safety research, policy, and education,” Madsen said. “The action plans are a start and are still evolving today as conference participants returned home and began

work to improve drivers education curriculum, promote proper farm equipment markings, and many other goals identified during the conference.”

A conference summary, recordings of all presentations, and state-based action plans are available through the Great Plains Center web site at <http://www.public-health.uiowa.edu/gpcah/admin/past-seminars.html#femvcpc>.

STORY SOURCE: University of Iowa College of Public Health Office of Communications and External Relations, 4257 Westlawn, Iowa City, Iowa 52242.

MEDIA CONTACT: Hannah Fletcher, UI College of Public Health Communications, 319-384-4277, hannah-fletcher@uiowa.edu; Murray Madsen, Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health, murray-madsen@uiowa.edu 319-335-4481.