

FARMERS MUST STOP ACCEPTING RISKS

By Julie Sorensen

For the past several years I have worked at the New York Center for Agricultural Medicine and Health (NYCAMH) participating in research efforts to reduce farm-related injuries and fatalities. In particular, my efforts have focused on the reduction of fatalities and injuries related to tractor overturns, the most frequent cause of injury and death in the farm community. As an agricultural health and safety researcher I've had the great privilege to speak to many farmers and their families, as well as members of the farm industry, from political representatives to industry representatives. There are two things that most considerably impress me in my interactions with the agricultural community. 1) You will never meet a more dedicated, hard working group of people and 2) you will never meet a group so seemingly accepting of the health and safety risks related to their occupation.

Although a strong work ethic never hurt anybody (except perhaps, John Henry), a complacent attitude towards the safety risks inherent in farming have. As a result, I am hoping to persuade the farmers or their families who may be reading this column to take a pause and carefully consider the following in regards to tractor overturns:

- In the Northeast tractors account for 55-60% of farm fatalities. Up to 2/3 of are due to overturns.
- The rate of rollover fatalities is highest in the Northeast, 8.4 deaths per 100,000 workers.
- For every overturn fatality there are approximately 5 serious non-fatal injuries.
- 58% of overturn injuries require hospital admission
- On average, 70 lost workdays are associated with an overturn injury.
- Roughly 13% of overturn injuries result in permanent disability to the injured worker.
- A farming fatality costs the family and society approximately \$910,000. A serious injury could cost more.
- Deaths and serious injuries can be almost entirely prevented with use of rollover protections structures (ROPS) and a seatbelt.
- With a ROPS protected tractor you have a 70% increased chance of survival even if you're not wearing your seatbelt. With a ROPS protected tractor and buckled seatbelt you have a 99+% chance of survival.

Of course, no one ever thinks that they will be injured or killed and it's easier to believe this when you've taken risks a million times and come through it unharmed. However, the approximately 250 individuals who died in tractor related incidents last year almost certainly felt the same. For those of you who believe your experience will largely

prevent you from being unharmed, your beliefs are unsupported by the statistics. 80% of the people who die in tractor overturns are experienced or very experienced tractor operators.

In summary I would strongly urge the tractor owners reading this column to call the toll-free NYS Roll-over Protective Structure Rebate Hotline, 1-877-ROPS-R4U (1-877-767-7748). The program is sponsored by our non-profit organization and the state legislature (courtesy of Senators Catharine Young and James Seward). It provides a 70% rebate for the entire cost of retrofitting your tractor (parts, shipping, and installation) up to \$765, as well as assistance finding and pricing ROPS kits for your tractor. The program is flexible, offering rebates for rollbars, ROPS with awnings and cabs that have built in ROPS. It also allows either self-installation or dealer installation. So call the ROPS hotline today! It's a call you can afford to make.

Also, to conduct on-farm safety training sessions and on-farm safety surveys contact Sharon Scofield at NYCAMH (800-343-7527 x236 or sscofield@nycamh.com). All of our safety services are available to you at no cost, voluntary and strictly confidential. Funding is provided in part by a grant from the NYS Department of Labor Hazard Abatement Board.

NYCAMH, a program of Bassett Healthcare Network, is enhancing agricultural and rural health by preventing and treating occupational injury and illness.