



Safety Up – On ATV Use

All-terrain vehicles (ATVs) are regular workhorses on the farm. They are also often used for recreation. Unfortunately, they are the source of serious safety concerns. The use of off-road vehicles on Canadian farms resulted in 17 deaths in Canada in the 1990s, and half of these were children under the age of 16.

According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information, the number of serious injuries has skyrocketed as well, with a recorded increase of 50 per cent in hospitalized injuries between 1996 and 2001 across Canada. The Canadian Safety Council reports that males aged 15 to 19 have the highest injury occurrence of all age groups.

ATVs – or four-wheelers as they're often called – demand respect. No one should ride them without training, appropriate supervision, protective equipment, and a thorough understanding of the potential hazards and how to manage them. **Know the job. Know the hazard. Know the drill.**

Three steps to safe farming

To keep farm safety top of mind, think of it as a three-step process that starts when you **know the job**. Knowing the job means getting properly trained ahead of time for each new task you perform. Next, **know the hazard** – stay alert for safety risks at all times during your workday. Finally, **know the drill** – learn how to handle the hazards you confront, either by managing them effectively or avoiding them altogether.

Get to know the vehicle

ATVs are motorized vehicles with four oversized, low-pressure tires, designed for uneven surfaces and off-highway work and recreation. They can weigh up to 600 pounds (272 kilograms) and reach speeds of well over 100 kilometres per hour. Engine size ranges from 50 cc to approximately 660 cc.

Before using an ATV, training is critical to ensure you have a full understanding of the machine. Approved ATV driver training courses are available through the Alberta Safety Council and other safety agencies.

Know the job.

Test the terrain

ATV-related injuries and fatalities are more likely if you don't use the vehicle properly. Experience demonstrates that some particular factors are more likely to lead to ATV crashes. **Know the hazard.**

Factors common to many ATV injury crashes include: driver misuse, inappropriate rider behaviour, driving at excessive speed, not wearing protective gear, accepting unnecessary risk, carrying passengers, improper supervision, and improper training.

To prevent incidents, follow these hazard-prevention guidelines:

- Driver error and loss of control commonly cause ATV crashes. Plan your route, drive at a reasonable speed for the terrain, and pay attention.
- Avoid tight turns and, when driving downhill, drive straight down rather than at an angle.
- Climb hills in low gear to avoid the chance of a back flip. Do not turn suddenly, pop the clutch or rev the throttle, as the ATV will pivot on the back axle and flip over, crushing the rider.
- Always wear a helmet approved for ATV or motorcycle use (by the Canadian Standards Association, Department of Transportation/ Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard, Snell or American National Standards Institute for motorcycle use, not for bicycle use).
- Wear proper protective clothing, including boots, gloves and long pants, along with proper eye protection, while travelling on an ATV.

Helmet is a no-brainer

Wearing a helmet while riding an ATV can make the difference between surviving and ending up dead. Statistics suggest a helmet may reduce risk of death by almost half (42%) and the risk of non-fatal head injury by nearly two thirds (64%).

What's the drill?

Once you have the training, know the equipment, and understand the hazardous situations that could put you at risk, you're ready to take responsibility for your own safety while driving an ATV. To avoid or manage hazards you encounter along the way, **know the drill**. To make ATV use safer:

- Do not operate on paved roads.
- Don't take unnecessary risks, such as performing stunts, using alcohol or drugs, or speeding.
- Do not operate an ATV in adverse weather, poor light, or on hazardous terrain.
- Do not drive an ATV that needs repair. Keep it in good mechanical condition.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions for maintenance.
- Shut off the engine and remove the key before getting off the ATV.
- Watch for small children and animals while driving.
- Don't take passengers. Passengers affect the balance and make it hard for the driver to stay in control. Only one person should ride on an ATV – the driver.
- If you'll be working alone while driving an ATV, carry a communication device with you such as a cell phone or two-way radio.
- Even with the best preparation, incidents sometimes happen. Take a first aid training course so you'll know how to respond in an emergency.
- Always let someone know where you are going and what time you will be back.

The last word

With the proper training and hazard awareness, ATVs can be fun to drive and helpful in completing work on the farm. The key is to take personal responsibility for your safety. When you use care and attention while driving an ATV, you can make the job easier while also protecting yourself from possible injury or death. Get the training, wear the gear, and stay alert for potential hazards all along the way.

References

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<http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/keepingkidssafe/ATV.htm>

ATV Safety, Farm Safety 4 Just Kids, Earlham, IA,
<http://www.fs4jk.org>

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<http://www.cdc.gov/nasd/docs/d000901-d001000/d000976/1.html>

Farm Safety Association, Ontario.

Children and ATV use – size it right!

An ATV is only as capable as its driver. Children should not drive an ATV unless it is recommended for their age group. Consider this:

- Nearly 25 per cent of those killed in ATV crashes in Canada are under 15 years old.
- More than one-third of those seriously injured in ATV crashes are under 15 years old.
- Over 90 per cent of youth under 16 who suffered ATV-related injuries were operating a vehicle recommended for an older age group.
- Children younger than 16 years old simply should not operate full-sized ATVs. They do not have the strength, skills or judgment necessary to handle them safely