

Safety Note #174

## Safe Driving on Country Roads



Source: The University of Iowa

Country roads and farmland can be scenic and peaceful, yet they can also be dangerous for farmers operating equipment and motorists using the same roads. If most of your driving experience has been in suburban or city areas, you might be surprised at how different driving on country roads can be. Extra caution is required when driving on country and rural roads because they are often not designed for urban high-speed travel.

It is particularly important to exercise caution when driving in remote areas. Help or emergency services may often be difficult to reach or delayed in the event of an accident. Beyond exercising normal driver safety, travel on rural country roads may also warrant additional precautions.

Here are some **safety tips for driving in rural areas:**

- Fill the fuel tank before leaving populated areas, and carry water, food, and emergency supplies.
- Adjust your speed so you feel comfortable and in control. Driving on country or rural roads brings a whole new host of hazards – dirt and debris, pot holes, loose dirt and gravel, oversized obstructions, and in some cases loose animals.
- Never exceed posted speed limits, and some circumstances require driving well below the posted speed. Roads are often narrow, with many sharp or blind curves, rises and dips.
- Turn your lights on. Rural roads might have a number of curves and bends that will prevent a driver from seeing the obstructions ahead. Debris and slow moving agriculture equipment are some of the likely hurdles along the way.
- Country roads can have unmarked field and farm driveways. Be aware and alert for abrupt crossings and intersections, and for other cars making abrupt turns.
- Accidents can occur when a driver 'stuck' behind a tractor or other Slow Moving Vehicle (SMV) gets impatient and does not exercise caution. When you encounter a SMV or agriculture equipment, you should always:
  - Slow down immediately and use caution. Avoid passing double yellow lines, around blind curves or other vehicles behind the SMV.
  - Always watch for hand signals, turn signals, driveways or other signs that might indicate the SMV is preparing to turn.
  - Never take risks when overtaking, pass with caution, always 'hang back' from the vehicle in front and check that there is plenty of clear road ahead before attempting to pass.
  - Towed agriculture equipment can often be much wider than the average car, so ensure that there is plenty of space for you to get past the other vehicle.
  - Avoid following immediately after another overtaking/passing vehicle. Do not pass unless you are absolutely sure you have time to complete the maneuver safely and NEVER be tempted to overtake more than one vehicle at a time.
- If a small animal (e.g. rabbit, coyote) runs into the road in front of you, do not dramatically slam on the brakes or try to swerve around it. Animals move rapidly and unpredictably, and may be confused by any changes in your approach or incautious maneuvers.

It is important not to be too aggressive when driving on country roads. People do not drive as fast as they might in the 'rat race' of the city. Always drive with caution and follow the above tips for safe operation of vehicles on country and rural roads.

For more information on **Safe Driving**, see Safety Notes #75, #90, and #132.