

SKID STEER SAFETY

News clippings underscore need to keep young children away



Skid steers are one of a farmer's most useful machines, but they are inherently dangerous to operate. Their power, quick-touch maneuverability and instability when loaded can lead to injury. In addition, the operator's field of vision is extremely limited, which is one of many good reasons to keep young children out of the agricultural worksite.

Research indicates non-working children ages 6 and younger are the most vulnerable to farm injury. This is especially true of children near a skid steer, who are at risk of being run over due to their small size (operators can't see them) and their unpredictable movements. In Neillsville, Wis., a 19-month-old boy was killed when a family member was moving round hay bales with a skid steer. The operator didn't even realize the child had been run over.

Headlines tell story

An article about a child's death might seem like an unfortunate

"accident." But when newspaper articles about fatalities are collected, they tell a larger story, revealing common elements and that the number of injuries and deaths due to skid steers on farms is increasing. News clippings about incidents involving skid steers, tractors and other machinery can be accessed at AgInjuryNews.org, so that parents can read and ask themselves, "Could this happen on my farm? How could this incident have been avoided?"

Other hazards

Besides being run over, there are entrapment hazards with skid steers. Hands, arms, feet and legs have been mangled and amputated from injuries that occur when the lift arms or bucket move unexpectedly. Additional hazards include hydraulic system failure and being crushed by falling objects.

16 and above

Operation of skid steers should be restricted to people 16 years of

age and older, who are trained on the safe operation and appropriate use of the equipment. Only those 16 years and older are developmentally advanced enough to operate a skid steer. Even at that age, questions have to be asked, such as can the child operate all controls while belted, and does he or she have the coordination to use their hands and feet at the same time? The Agricultural Youth Work Guidelines have a guideline for operating a skid steer, which parents and supervisors can use to help evaluate a youth's readiness for this job. In addition, the guideline contain information on hazards, protective strategies and adult responsibilities, including supervision.

Many of the injuries from skid steers are predictable - and therefore preventable. For instance, last year in an incident near Athens, Wis., a 3-year-old boy was run over and killed after falling out of the bucket of a skid steer - driven by his 7-year-old brother.

Safety tips

- Do not allow young children in the worksite.
- Know your field of vision and learn all blind spots.
- Keep bystanders at a safe distance
- Never permit riders in the bucket or operator's compartment.
- Instruct workers, family members and other persons that they should never approach skid steers or other operating equipment until they make eye contact with the operator and the operator discontinues operation. The operator should be trained to stop equipment movement prior to allowing a person to approach.

