



Safe practices can help prevent tractor rollovers and runovers

Byline: Canadian Agricultural Safety Association

It's common knowledge that tractors are used day in and day out on farms across Canada. They're essential to farm productivity and are a regular sight on rural roadways during the spring planting and fall harvest seasons.

But while tractors are vital for completing many farm tasks, using these machines is a hazardous activity that people often overlook for being so commonplace. In fact, tractor rollovers and runovers are the leading causes of agriculture fatalities.

According to the latest Canadian Agriculture Injury Reporting data, between 2011 and 2020, there were 91 agriculture fatalities due to machine rollovers and 90 deaths caused by machine runovers. In fact, over one-third (38%) of all agriculture-related fatalities in Canada were due to three machine-related causes: runovers, rollovers, and being pinned or struck by a machine component.

While those figures can be startling, the good news is that rollovers and runovers are easy to prevent if basic safety practices are followed. Below are safety best practices that will help prevent rollovers and runovers from occurring.

General Tractor Operation

- Always use a tractor equipped with a rollover protective structure (ROPS) and seatbelt. If a tractor doesn't have these, have it retrofitted. While ROPS and seatbelts won't prevent a rollover from occurring, they are effective in preventing serious injuries or death.
- Never use a homemade structure if your machinery needs to be retrofitted with a ROPS.
- Keep in mind that a sun canopy **does not** provide rollover protection and should not be used in place of a ROPS.



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agsafetyweek.ca // March 12-18, 2023

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- Before getting into the tractor, do a pre-operational inspection by walking around it to check for obstructions and bystanders and to check the general condition of the machine. If any systems are faulty, do not use the machinery.
- When coming to a stop, make sure you are parked on even ground and disengage the PTO (if attached).
- Remember that tractors are not intended to be passenger vehicles. Except for machines with instructional seats, tractors are built for only one person to operate. Passengers can interfere with safe operation of the machinery and be at risk of serious injury
- Always drive at a speed appropriate for the machinery and conditions.
- Keep tractors and other farm machinery well-maintained, paying particular attention to electrical and braking systems. Remember to also occasionally check seat belts and ROPS for signs of wear that could compromise safety.

Backward Rollovers

- Do not hitch a load above the tractor drawbar.
- When starting to drive forward, do so slowly and be prepared to cut power quickly if the front end begins to rise. Remember to change speeds gradually.
- Use front-end counterweights to increase stability when raising heavy equipment on the back.
- Always drive around ditches, never across them.
- Do not drive forward up a hill or backward down one. It's safest to back up a slope and drive down one.
- Tractors are prone to tipping when the wheels are stuck, so back out or have the tractor towed out by another machine if you become stuck.
- Keep loaded front-end buckets low to the ground during transport.

Sideways Rollovers

- Never drive close to an incline, embankment, or ditch and avoid large obstacles (like tree stumps), depressions, and uneven terrain.
- Watch your speed when turning – driving too fast when making a turn can easily cause a rollover.
- When loaded with side-mounted implements, keep them on the uphill side.



- Before travelling at higher speeds, lock the brake pedals together to ensure even brake pressure.
- Never carry a load that is too heavy for the machine, and always travel at speed appropriate for the load.
- If a tractor's right front tire goes off the road, do not turn the wheel sharply to get it back on the road. Instead, hold steady and slowly ease the tire back on the road.
- When going downhill, use engine braking.

Runovers

- Before starting the tractor, ensure all controls are in the neutral position and the parking brake is applied.
- Never start the tractor or operate any controls from anywhere other than the seat.
- After coming to a stop, place all controls in the neutral position, apply the parking brake, and then turn off the engine.
- Do not dismount a tractor if it is still moving.
- Avoid parking a tractor on a hill. If parking on a slope is absolutely necessary, ensure no one works in the tractor's path.

While there's no denying that tractor rollovers and runovers can have serious and even deadly consequences, they are preventable. And fortunately, implementing safety measures on the farm doesn't have to be complicated. Following basic safety precautions while using tractors and other farm machinery can help ensure everyone on the farm stays safe.

To find more farm safety tips, visit agsafetyweek.ca.

For more than a decade, CASA has been raising awareness about the importance of safety on Canadian farms through Canadian Agricultural Safety Week, which takes place every year during the third week of March. In 2023, CASW is presented in partnership with key partners Farm Credit Canada and Decisive Farming by TELUS Agriculture. Other sponsors include CN, Canadian Canola Growers Association, Syngenta, and Fertilizer Canada.