

NEWS COLUMN

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Remember Combine Safety for the Upcoming Harvest

The combine is among the most dangerous machines on the farm. Agricultural Injury Statistics show that the combine, grain auger, and tractor are machines most involved in South Dakota agricultural injuries.

Farmers and agricultural equipment operators should think ahead to establish safety procedures that prevent injuries. Offered are these considerations:

- Set aside time to properly prepare the combine for harvest. Rushed repairs may lead to injuries.
- Conduct a safety check before taking to the field. Replace all guards and shields that may have been removed. Repair or replace all lights that don't work—especially transport lights, such as headlights and taillights.
- Examine fields for hazards such as erosion washouts that can develop during the growing season. Alert other workers to those hazards.
- Adjust and service the combine as directed in the operator's manual. There are usually some adjustments that need to be made while the machine is running, but others should be done with the machine stopped and the key removed from the tractor or combine's ignition switch. Remember the hazards posed by straw choppers and spreaders—allow adequate run-down time before approaching the rear of the combine.
- Always refuel the combine or tractor after it has cooled. Fuel vapors can easily ignite on a hot engine or parts. Refueling accidents are a major cause of combine fires.
- Make sure there is suitable fire-fighting equipment such as a fire extinguisher available in the combine. The extinguisher should be regularly checked and in a place where you can reach it from the ground.
- Grease and check the combine in the morning while your mind is fresh. Put the ignition key in your pocket while working on the combine so no one can start it while you are working on the machine.
- Check hydraulic leaks carefully. Use a piece of cardboard, wood, or sheet metal to detect leaks. Hydraulic oil under high pressure can easily be injected through the skin and result in serious medical problems.
- Drive the combine only while you are alert and aware of your surroundings. Hours of steady operation can lull you to a hypnotic state. To avoid this dangerous situation, schedule a break for all workers every two to three hours. Change jobs with someone else who can operate the combine for a while.
- Use the safety stops on the header lift cylinders when working under the header. Don't trust hydraulics with your life.
- Keep your distance from other vehicles and machines. Combines need a lot of room to maneuver and have large blind spots. Always be aware of the location of other equipment.
- Move combines from field to field only during daylight. Driving combines on public roads after dark can be very risky. The size of a combine coupled with its unfamiliar shape and lighting pattern, make it a dangerous hazard on the road after dark.
- To control dust and noise, always operate with the cab door shut. Exposure to high levels of grain dust may cause ill health, including occupational asthma, farmer's lung, grain fever, chronic bronchitis, allergic eye and nasal infections.