



Cornell University Cooperative Extension Washington County

415 Lower Main Street
Hudson Falls, NY 12839

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Phone: (518) 746-2560

Contact Person: John F. Bowe

1-800-548-0881

Tractor & ATV Safety: What should parents and employers know?

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Washington County hosted a Tractor & ATV Safety program for youth 14-15 (Department of Labor requirement) at the Hartford Central School on April 9 & 10. Eleven youth from Washington and Saratoga Counties attended the program (9 & 2 respectively).

At the beginning of each of these classes there is an informal survey to determine the skill level, breadth of knowledge, and accident history of the program. The tractor certification part of the class requires 20-hours of training on a tractor, home study, and classroom sessions, as well as a written & driving test. A quarter of the class had been driving tractors on the family farm since they were nine years old. An additional 25% started tractor operation while they were 10-12 years of age. The remaining 50% had not started until they were at least 13. The vast majority of the class lived or worked on a farm of some type (including horse, dairy, vegetable, and sod). None of the students had ever experienced any type of tractor accident, while 40% had received mainly minor injuries in some type of fall. Falls generally make up 33% of the accidents on farms and are the most common accident. Employers and parents should go over the operation of each part of equipment with the youth and provide a manufacturer's manual for review.

While the history of tractor operation for these students was excellent, especially when considering the age that some of them began operating equipment. Their ATV experience

though was dramatically different. Fifty percent of the class had been in at least one ATV accident. When asked the severity of the accident, all of these individuals had been involved in some type of roll-over. Of these students, only one of them had been wearing a helmet. Few of these accidents actually involved farm work at the time though may have involved the farm ATV.

What do these statistics tell us? For one, ATVs are far more prevalent on farms than ever before and that they are often being used for recreation when not at work. Helmets are either not being provided or are not being worn. These statistics also tell us that ATV safety needed to be included in Tractor Safety and that efforts should be made to develop safety behavior at an even younger age. Washington County was the first in New York State to integrate ATV safety into the Tractor Safety program when a survey of past students revealed that they were experiencing two to three times as many ATV accidents on the farm than any other type of accident.

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Washington County is currently working on bringing such programs into schools or after-school programs to try and reach both riding and non-riding youth alike. Parents and employers MUST enforce the use of helmets. Eighty-eight percent of deaths and paralysis caused by ATV accidents are directly related to not wearing a helmet at the time of the accident (NMSTOP 2005). If there is one behavior that we can change and make a significant difference, the use of a helmet is primary.

During the training, the class learned about proper mounting and dismounting (three points of contact) of tractors and skid steers, operation of these tractors/skid steers, and avoidance of the most dangerous area of the tractor (where the PTO runs from the tractor to the equipment). Each youth must demonstrate a walk-around safety check, operation through an obstacle course, and score at least an 80 on the written test that covers tractor and general farm safety. They must also demonstrate sensible behavior and proper attire (no loose clothing, snug fitting, and long hair tied back and controlled). Personal protective devices like ear plugs, safety glasses, boots, and proper ATV equipment was also stressed and required during operation.

Guest presenters included Tim Havens of Falls Farm & Garden and a New York Center for Agricultural Medical Health Educator. Equipment was loaned to the class from Falls Farm & Garden, Salem Farm Supply, and Progressive Power Equipment. Special thanks must also be provided to Cassandra Lynne Hughes and the Hartford Central School for allowing us the use of their facility.

If you would like more information about farm safety or about this program or the new school enrichment programs, please call John Bowe at 746-2560.

Photo 1: Isn't that smile worth protecting with a helmet? Alexandra (Alex) Griffen shows off an ATV helmet during the safety class. Photo by John Bowe.

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