

Roadway deaths seen as major concern for state ag industry

Posted on Tuesday, Dec 20, 2022

The Marshfield Clinic Research Institute is spotlighting roadway deaths as a major safety concern for Wisconsin's agriculture industry.

The institute's National Farm Medicine Center partners with the UW-Madison Division of Extension to produce the Wisconsin Farm Related Fatalities Reports. Six of the 40 ag-related deaths in 2019 and five of the 28 deaths in 2020 were roadway fatalities, according to the latest data released from these reports.

John Shutske, a professor and ag safety specialist with UW-Madison, says farm fatality numbers "remain alarmingly high" due to various hazards including transportation risks.

"Many continue to be concerned with the high number of deaths on public roadways," he said in a statement. "Clearly, as farms get bigger and farmers need to spend more time on the road moving from farm to farm/field to field, we are going to see more and more risk on roadways."

According to the institute, "seemingly little progress" is being made toward meeting standards for farm equipment lighting and marking established by industry groups and safety specialists.

Bryan Weichelt, an associate research scientist with the National Farm Medicine Center, says the main concern is low visibility for "unmarked, under-marked or unlit farm equipment" putting operators and other motorists at risk.

Shutske says federal law established about five years ago required all farm equipment made after mid-2017 to include enhanced lighting and marking. But that requirement isn't fully reflected in state-level regulations, he said, which "concerns many of us who work in safety engineering and who try to bridge the interests of farmers and those who manufacture and sell farm equipment."

While he says the state has made some "needed upgrades" in recent years to

lighting and marking requirements for slow-moving farm equipment, those changes haven't gone far enough. He argues Wisconsin lags other Midwest states in aligning with standards set by the American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers.

"We really can do better," he said. "Simple devices like turn signals on tractors and implements and using lights and flashers any time these machines are operating on roadways is really something that the data shows would save lives."

See the 2019 report:

<https://marshfieldresearch.org/Media/Default/NFMC/PDFs/2019%20Farm%20Fatality%20Report.pdf>

See the 2020 report:

<https://marshfieldresearch.org/Media/Default/NFMC/PDFs/2020%20Farm%20Fatality%20Report.pdf>

-By Alex Moe