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K-State agriculture expert urges safety when driving off-road vehicles

Larson notes that more than 600 Americans die annually due to ATV, UTV accidents

By Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. – As Kansas' weather warms, the use of off-road vehicles becomes more common on the state's farms and ranches.

Tawnie Larson, the program manager for the Kansas Agriculture Safety and Health program at Kansas State University, said All-Terrain Vehicles, or ATVs, and Utility Task Vehicles, UTVs, are "essential tools on farms and ranches."

"But they also pose significant risks if not used properly," Larson said.

She notes that Ag Injury News, a database that compiles agriculture-related incidents from public news sources, reports that over the last several years in Kansas, at least 10 people have died in ATV and UTV crashes.

The majority of fatalities in the Sunflower State involve men between the ages of 55 and 83 using ATVs for work. Some fatalities have involved passengers during recreational use.

Nationally, Purdue University reports that more than 101,000 people are treated annually for ATV or UTV injuries, and approximately 10,000 are hospitalized each year. More than 600 people die each year as a result of an ATV or UTV accident.

"UTVs are generally considered more safe than ATVs due to their design," Larson said. "UTVs include roll bars, seat belts and speed governors. UTVs are larger, heavier and typically operate at lower speeds, making them ideal for farm work, such as transporting tools, feed and even calves."

Larson shared some safety measures for UTVs:

- Never allow human passengers to ride in the cargo area.
- Always wear seatbelts.
- Plan routes carefully, avoiding obstacles, washouts and rocks.
- Stay within the recommended speed limits and operate with caution.

ATVs are often used for recreation, as well as agricultural work, including checking livestock and spraying weeds. Larson said they are more often involved in crashes compared to UTVs; most fatalities on ATVs are linked to excessive speed and inattentive driving.

She notes that common ATV hazards include underage operators, extra passengers (ATVs are usually designed for a single rider), rough terrain, and roadway collisions.

Safety measures for ATVs include:

- Wear protective gear, including a helmet, eye protection, long sleeves and pants, and proper footwear (boots, not sandals or flip-flops).
- Follow age guidelines. The minimum age to operate an ATV on public land and roads in Kansas is 16. "Remember that not all children have the strength, skill or judgment needed to operate an ATV," Larson said.

Larson also suggests that parents, grandparents and other guardians require children to take a training class to learn proper handling techniques; and to understand how shifting weight forward or backward is helpful in certain conditions.

More information is available online at <https://atvsafety.org>, or by contacting Larson by email (tawnie@ksu.edu) or phone (785-532-2976).

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