

Skid-Steer Safety

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Skid-steer loaders are valuable “workhorses” for many farms. However, recent accidents emphasize that staying alert is vital for skid-steer operators and their co-workers. A moment of carelessness may result in broken bones, an amputation, a crushed torso or possibly death.

One operator was pinned under an overturned loader on a manure pile. A co-worker was fatally crushed in another accident. Several co-workers have been run over when they failed to get clear of a loader’s path when it changed directions.

Rollovers can occur when the bucket strikes an obstruction – an embankment, portion of a farm structure or a truck you may be loading. Certainly, operating the loader with the bucket raised requires caution and moderate speeds. Also, be cautious operating at high speeds with the bucket just above the floor or roadway. The bucket may catch when crossing a footing or bouncing over a ridge.

Momentum may cause an overturn when wheels on one side ride up on a pile of poultry litter or drop into a washout or similar drop-off. An upset at high speed is much more likely to cause a fatality.

Follow These Basics

- Don’t overload a bucket or attachments or carry a load which could fall. Lifting attachments can change the weight distribution of the loader. Attach-



ments can also affect the loader’s stability and handling response. Be sure you can keep the machine under complete control at all times.

- When changing buckets or installing attachments, make sure all connectors are securely fastened.
- Never modify your skid-steer’s rollover protective structure. Doing so could result in severe injury or death.
- Know and avoid the pinch points and rotating parts on the loader.
- Never allow an untrained individual to operate the machine. Read the operator’s manual. Participate in a training course offered regularly.
- A skid-steer loader is a one-person machine. **Never permit riders!** Don’t use the bucket for a work platform or personnel carrier. An extra rider has no protection should any type of accident occur. Overturns are a common type of accident. An extra rider is often crushed when a skid-steer loader turns over.

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- Never overload the lift with hay bales, bales of cotton or materials that could injure someone if they fall. Keep the loaded bucket level as lift arms are moved and as the loader climbs slopes or traverses ramps.
- Always look around before you back up or swing an attachment. Be sure that everyone is in the clear. Keep others away from the area of loader operation. **Never lift, swing or move a load over anyone.**

Operate Loaders Safely

- Always keep the seat belt/operator restraint fastened.
- Never leave the operator seat without first raising the operator seat bar (if so equipped), lowering the lift arms (or engaging the lift arm restraints) and stopping the engine.
- Never attempt to work the controls unless properly seated. Keep all of your body inside the cab while operating a skid-steer loader.
- Avoid sudden stops, starts or turns. Operate controls smoothly – don't jerk the steering.
- Carry the bucket low for maximum stability and visibility. Any load should be carried high enough to clear floor or ground obstacles but no higher than necessary.
- Raise loads slowly and at an even rate. Be ready to lower the load quickly if the machine becomes unstable.
- Never drive across excessively steep slopes.

Work Safely

- Watch out for overhead obstructions. Poultry houses, cotton gins, fertilizer storage, etc., may have low-hanging electrical wiring. Walk through the area where you expect to operate because wiring is easier to see on foot, especially if the area is poorly lighted.

- When raising a load, especially in a poultry house, make sure it clears the lower beam of the roof trusses and the door opening.
- Poultry houses vary from 30 to 40 feet wide. Consider the fans, roosts and other components that narrow the area available for turning around.
- Don't get close to the trench wall when backfilling. Never operate a skid-steer too close to the edge of an overhang or gully. The edges could collapse, or a slide could occur.
- Never undercut a high bank.
- Don't lift loader arms too high or roll the bucket too far back when handling materials that could fall into the operator's compartment.
- Watch out for obstacles and adjust speed to conditions.
- Routinely check the brakes and adjust them properly.
- Never attempt maintenance or other work under the bucket or around the lift supports without installing sturdy blocks or safety supports under the bucket. Guards and shields are to protect you, so don't fail to replace them after repairs or service.

Safety interlocks and "operator-present" controls are a vital part of your protection. To bypass them puts your well-being at risk and may add to your liability should someone else be injured.

Rarely do safe practices require more time or money. Most safe procedures can be adopted into your regular routine. Many farm, gin and fertilizer plant accidents can be prevented with good house-keeping, attention to safety warnings and proper equipment operation. And the payoff from making safety an integral part of everything you do is a better quality of life for you, your family and those who work for you.

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