

Conduct a Good Pre-Operational Check of Your Equipment

By Jim Carrabba

A very good safety habit to adopt is to conduct daily pre-operational checks of tractors and equipment each day before you use them. Pre-operation checks are not only a good safety practice, they can also save you a lot of money in maintenance and downtime costs. One of the best things you can do to make sure your equipment is in top shape is to do a complete, walk around inspection of the machine before you use it for the first time each day. This pre-operational check is essential to insure that your equipment is in good repair and is safe to operate. A breakdown with your machinery could cost you thousands of dollars in repair costs and could also cost you a lot of money in crop losses if a mechanical breakdown causes a harvest delay. If you find any problems during your pre-operational check, make sure you correct the problem before using the machine.

Good operators will have a daily checklist of items to look at as they perform the pre-operational check. These items to check can be on a printed form, and the operator will check off the items as they are inspected. Having a list such as this will help the operator to remember all the things that they should be checking as they perform the pre-operation check. To perform a good walk around inspection of a tractor, start at one point and check things as you go all the way around it. As you walk around, look at all fluid levels such as engine oil, coolant, fuel, and hydraulic fluid. Look underneath the tractor; do you see any big leaks or puddles of fluid that have accumulated under the tractor? Look closely at the tires. Do they look properly inflated? What is the condition of the tires? Do the tires have big cuts or gouges in them? Observe the lug nuts and see if they appear tight. Check the batteries to make sure they are securely held down, the connections are clean and the electrolyte level is good.

As you are walking around, look for any obvious damage like cracked or broken parts, leaking or damaged hoses. Make sure the SMV emblem is in place and is clean and unfaded. Make sure that the steps are clean of any grease or mud that could cause you to slip. Check to see that the operator's platform or cab is free of any objects that could interfere with the operation of the tractor. If you have a cab tractor, keep the windows clean for good visibility. Properly adjust the seat for a comfortable position. Check the seatbelt to see if it is functioning. Tractors should be equipped with fire extinguishers. If the fire extinguisher has a pressure gauge, make sure it is in the "good" range. After you start the tractor, observe the engine oil pressure gauge and make sure that there is oil pressure in the engine. Allow your tractor to warm up for three to five minutes. As the tractor is warming up, turn on the lights and flashers. Walk around the tractor and see if all the lights and flashers are functioning.

If you would like more information or wish to schedule a free on-farm safety survey or on-farm safety training session, contact Jim Carrabba, Farm Safety Education Specialist at (800) 343-7527 ext 239 or e-mail jcarrabba@nycamh.com. The on-farm safety training sessions and on-farm surveys are supported by a grant from the New York State Department of Labor Hazard Abatement Board. NYCAMH, a program of Bassett Healthcare Network, is enhancing agricultural and rural health by preventing and treating occupational injury and illness.