Utility Vehicle Safety at Home and Work Meeting Kit

Utility type vehicles are prominent pieces of equipment utilized in a variety of settings. The hauling features offered by UTVs have increased their popularity, availability, and use in work-related tasks in rural, suburban, and urban areas.

UTILITY VEHICLE INCIDENTS

There are various reports of estimated injury and fatalities relating to the use of these machines. Enough incidents resulting in injuries occurred that the Consumer Product Safety Commission took notice and recommended changes to the designs of the machines.

There are many incidents that occur that are not reported or are incorrectly categorized which greatly reduces the reported injuries resulting from operating these machines.

DESCRIPTION OF UTV

These vehicles can have four or six wheels and are powered by diesel, gasoline engines, electric or a hydrogen fuel cell. UTVs were designed for work purposes. Most models include a bed to enable the hauling of feed, mulch, or other supplies, which makes them convenient transport for small jobs.

Utility type vehicles have a steering wheel, acceleration foot pedal, and a brake foot pedal. In addition, these vehicles are designed to carry passengers. Most UTVs have side-by-side or bench seating and are equipped with a seat belt for the operator and passenger. An occupant protective structure, which commonly includes a system of tubular bars, surrounds the space where the operator and/or passenger are seated. Other protective features could include: hard plastic doors, sturdy canvas netting, or handholds.

WORKERS NEED TO FAMILIARIZE WITH THE MACHINE AND JOB

Because the uses for utility vehicles are so varied, understanding where and how the UTV will be used is also paramount to operator safety. It’s imperative to get to know the utility vehicles in the fleet, to understand their implements and to see how they work. Conducting a complete walk-around of the vehicle before use is always a good practice; be sure to inspect tires, wheels and attachments to make sure they are in good working condition and ready for the task at hand.

Here are additional safety practices to follow when driving a UTV:

- Keep legs and arms inside the vehicle at all times.
- Drive slowly and turn smoothly to avoid an overturn.
- When hauling cargo the vehicle’s center of gravity is raised, increasing the chance of overturning.
- Drive completely up or down a slope or hill before making a turn. Do not turn the vehicle in mid-slope or hill as this increases the probability of overturning.
- Use the appropriate speed on rough terrain.
- Operators and passengers have been thrown from vehicles.
- Stay clear of ditches and embankments.
- Passengers must be tall enough to reach handhold while their backs are against the seat and their feet are flat on the floorboards.
- Each passenger must ride in his/her own seat, not anywhere else on the UTV.
- Operators must back up carefully. Look especially for children before backing.
- Operators should be free from the influence of drugs or alcohol.

TRAVELING GUIDELINES FOR OPERATORS AND GROUND PERSONNEL

They will work in almost any rugged environment, but the key to success is to operate it safely and cautiously. Proper operating speed should be maintained based on work conditions and environment.

- Always travel straight up or down a hill. To avoid a rollover when driving on a hill, don’t turn abruptly in a new direction.
- Drive slowly and carefully when you are unsure of the surface conditions.
- Use four-wheel drive and maintain low speeds on areas covered with clay, mud, ice or snow to prevent uncontrolled skidding.
- When turning, always slow down. High speed turns can cause the utility vehicle to rollover.

BEST SAFETY AND OPERATION PRACTICES

- A common oversight occurs when operators do not account for the weight of the passengers in addition to the vehicle’s cargo when calculating the payload weight.
- An overloaded vehicle puts too much pressure on the UTV’s suspension and can cause it to bottom out when in transit. This can break the axles and possibly eject the passengers in the process.
- The solution is a matter of awareness. Too often, a crew shows up on a jobsite and is given the seemingly mundane task of transporting a large amount of material from one location to another. Because UTVs don’t have indicators on the body of the vehicle specifying the maximum weight capacity, the crew simply fills the bed with material until they see the suspension flex. In these cases, the vehicle is likely over its recommended capacity even before the two crewmen sit in the cab, adding their own weight to an already-stressed UTV.
- Clamping down on distractions among UTV operators, especially the use of cell phones and two-way radios.
- It is critical to ensure that the vehicles are in safe working order. A walk-around inspection of the vehicles every morning before work begins seems like an obvious precaution, but the process can easily be overlooked. Look for a clean windshield, make sure the dump bed is working properly and check the tires.

FINAL WORD

Utility vehicles can be dangerous machines if not operated safely. It is necessary to follow all the safety requirements for the specific vehicle you are operating. Even when off of the job, always operate these machines in a safe and controlled condition.