



Sharing roads with farm vehicles & equipment

On Thursday 13th August 2015, a vehicle accident occurred in a rural, village location which involved a farm tractor and a Northern Powergrid Vauxhall Corsa Pool Car which was being driven by Trainee Engineer Martin Brady. The circumstances of the accident were not of Martin's making and neither he, nor the third party sustained any injuries but the incident has served to identify a potentially significant risk to drivers, particularly those making journeys on narrow country roads in rural locations where farmers are likely to be active during harvest season.

Martin was driving at an appropriate speed along a narrow road past a blind junction on his left. He had priority. The tractor was approaching the junction along the minor road. The front loader attachment fitted to the tractor struck his car and caused significant damage to the roof and passenger side. The damage to the Vauxhall Corsa is consistent with the tractor driver lowering the loader attachment to improve his visibility as he approached the junction.

The loader attachment was fitted with long, sharp metal tines used for loading and unloading large bales of hay and straw. Fortunately in this case, there was no penetration by the tines into Martin's car.

Thanks to Martin's quick thinking immediately after the incident, and his photographic expertise, he was able to secure solid evidence of the incident from which we have been able to determine the circumstances and expedite an appropriate incident classification of Non Preventable Vehicle Accident. The photographs will also help in the subsequent insurance claim. Well done Martin!

Agricultural vehicles have every right to be on the road. Over a number of years these vehicles have become longer, wider, taller, heavier and faster which has introduced particular challenges for their driver's although they still have to comply with the law and abide by the Rules of the Highway Code.

The follow up to this incident has identified that the drivers' seat of the tractor is about 5 metres behind the front of the vehicle including its loader attachment and it is worth bearing in mind, the larger the tractor, the further behind the front of it the driver is likely to be. This driving position makes it very difficult for the drivers of these machines to gain effective and clear views at junctions.



From the non-tractor driver's point of view, when driving along rural roads, it is worth bearing the following points in mind:

- Look for evidence of farm vehicles and equipment, i.e. fresh tractor tyre tracks along the edge of grass verges, mud on the road surface, loose straw at the edge of the road or on the verges, a trail of corn along the gutter or sweeping across the carriageway at junctions and around bends and roundabouts, tractors or combine harvesters working in fields next to roads, home-made warning signs etc. Observing and recognising the evidence of nearby agricultural work should raise your expectations about encountering farm vehicles and equipment;
- Think about travelling a little slower than you might otherwise do. This will provide you with more time to slow down and if necessary to stop;
- Watch out for warning signs that may alert you to hazards and act on the information you are given, i.e. junction warning sign where you cannot see the junction;
- Consider your position on the road as you approach junctions and bends that are blind or where views are restricted. For example, if there is a junction on the left, and it is safe to do so, move towards the right. Not only will this enhance your view into the junction but it will also provide an earlier view of your vehicle to the driver of a vehicle approaching the junction along the minor road. If you are approaching a right hand bend, move your vehicle to the left as close to the verge or kerb as it is safe to do so. This will again improve and provide earlier views for both drivers.
- Appropriate use of the audible warning instrument (horn) in your vehicle may be beneficial in some circumstances as it can draw attention to your presence.

We cannot avoid using narrow rural roads that are also typically going to be used by large agricultural vehicles and equipment so let's try to share them as safely as possible by following this simple advice.

Every employee and contractor, working for Northern Powergrid, should go home at the end of each shift uninjured and in good health after a productive days work

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