

Revised standards for agricultural vehicles

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Revised safety standards for agricultural vehicles take effect from 1 January 2016. They are being introduced following a comprehensive review undertaken by the Road Safety Authority (RSA) relating to the use of agricultural vehicles on public roads.

Currently there are special provisions in road traffic regulations for vehicles which are primarily designed for working on farms, but which occasionally use a public road.

These regulations have been in place for over 50 years, during which time agricultural vehicles have become bigger, faster and more powerful. Their use has been expanded to include a wide variety of tasks outside the scope of the current regulations. They are also used much more frequently on public roads today than in the past.

However, they are not currently required to comply with minimum safety standards in a number of key areas, such as braking, lighting and visibility, weights, dimensions and coupling, as well as plating and speed rating.

For example, agricultural trailers often do not have appropriate tyres, suspension or braking systems fitted, nor are they equipped with braking systems which are designed to operate at the maximum speed at which the tractor towing them is capable of travelling.

This poses a serious road safety risk and is leading to situations where agricultural tractor and trailer combinations using public roads are often under-braked, resulting in premature brake wear or failure, including the possibility of jack-knifing.

Therefore, it is vital that agricultural vehicles, especially those capable of operating at speeds over 40km/h, are fitted with safer and more efficient braking systems.

Following a comprehensive review of current legislation, policy and practice relating to the use of agricultural vehicles, including public consultations and discussions with agricultural and industry stakeholders, the RSA submitted recom-



Jeff Harvey

Pictured at the launch of the RSA videos at the 2015 National Ploughing Championship were (from left) Denise Barry, director of standards and enforcement; Anna May McHugh, managing director, National Ploughing Association and Justin Martin, RSA vehicle standards engineer.

mendations to the minister which resulted in revised standards being introduced. These were signed by the minister in June 2014 and are effective from 1 January next.

The changes have been framed to deliver road safety benefits at the least possible cost to owners of agricultural vehicles.

It is expected that the majority of agricultural tractors will be able to comply with the new requirements with minimal investment. However, due to the wide variation in current construction standards, some trailers already in service will need more extensive remedial work to achieve compliance.

With this in mind, a progressive range of measures are being introduced whereby farmers and contractors wishing to operate their vehicles at higher weights and speeds will have to comply with more onerous requirements.

In summary

- More powerful braking systems will be required for agricultural vehicles operating at speeds greater than 40km/h. Most of the correctly maintained tractors which have come into use in the past 30 years already meet these requirements.
- Agricultural vehicles will need to be equipped with appropriate lighting systems, flashing amber beacons and reflective markings.
- Trailers operating at weights over 19t and 22.5t for tandem and triaxle trailers respectively, or at speeds

exceeding 40km/h, will require fitting of a weights and dimensions plate and a speed disc.

- New national weight limits are being introduced. These will enable tractor and trailer combinations which are unplated to continue in use at limits which are safe for such vehicles, ie combinations of agricultural tractors and trailers where either of them is unplated will have their maximum towable mass capped at three times the tractor's unladen weight. Plated tractors and trailer combinations will benefit from being able to operate at higher weight limits of up to 24t and 34t for tandem and triaxle agricultural trailers respectively that meet certain additional requirements in relation to tyres, suspension systems and steering axles.

- Self-propelled equipment exceeding 3.5 metres in width will require an escort vehicle carrying wide load signage when travelling on public roads.

Further information on the new standards is available on www.rsa.ie. A booklet explaining the changes has also been prepared and can be downloaded from the agricultural vehicles section of the website. Hard copies are available from the orders online section.

A suite of videos (made in conjunction with the Farm Tractor & Machinery Trade Association) which bring to life the contents of the booklet has been prepared. These were launched at the 2015 National Ploughing Championships and can be viewed at www.youtube.com/RSAIreland