



Know your blind spots inside the white line, the driver has NO vision

## Get serious about tractor safety

In the last 10 years 210 people have lost their lives on Irish farms. That's 210 families whose lives have been changed forever

**Serena Gibbons**  
Teagasc education officer  
Mellowes Campus, Athenry

The introduction of a health and safety element in DAFM schemes, such as Knowledge Transfer Groups and TAMS (Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme), helps highlight safety on farms. However, with farmers dealing with increasingly busy workloads and suffering ever-greater time pressure, they find it difficult to take the time to implement a safety-first attitude and

practices. The consequences can be grim. In recent years, the number of tractor accidents has increased, with strikes and crushes causing injury and even death.

The vast majority of Irish farms have a tractor, regardless of the size of the farm. If tractor safety is an area that could do with improvement, make two or three small changes which could greatly reduce the risk of you or anyone on the farm becoming the next person injured in a tractor accident. You will never regret the effort you make in relation to safety on your farm.

### Maintenance

The tractor, a fabulous invention, is the work horse of the farm and it can be difficult to manage without it when repairs or service are needed, but having a tractor that is not in good operational order is an invitation for an accident to occur. A simple thing, such as a faulty handbrake, can result in untold damage or injury.

The *Risk Assessment Document* provides a quick checklist of the "health" of your tractor. Complete

this checklist honestly and if any of the answers are negative, act immediately to rectify the problem.

- **Blind spots:** Get to know your blind spots (areas that are not visible when you are sitting in the tractor seat). It is surprising how poor visibility can be from a tractor seat, all-round 360° visibility is rarely available. Be aware of the reasons for blind spots from your tractor. These can include window bars, high mudguards and large machinery or trailers being attached. Children, and even adults, assume you can see them, but quite often they are invisible to the tractor driver. Raise this awareness among your employees and family, particularly children.

- **Children:** Under the new *Children's Code of Practice*, youngsters between the ages of eight and 16+ may be carried on a tractor or other farm machinery, but only if they have a dedicated seat, fitted with a seatbelt. They must wear the belt. Children of seven or under are not

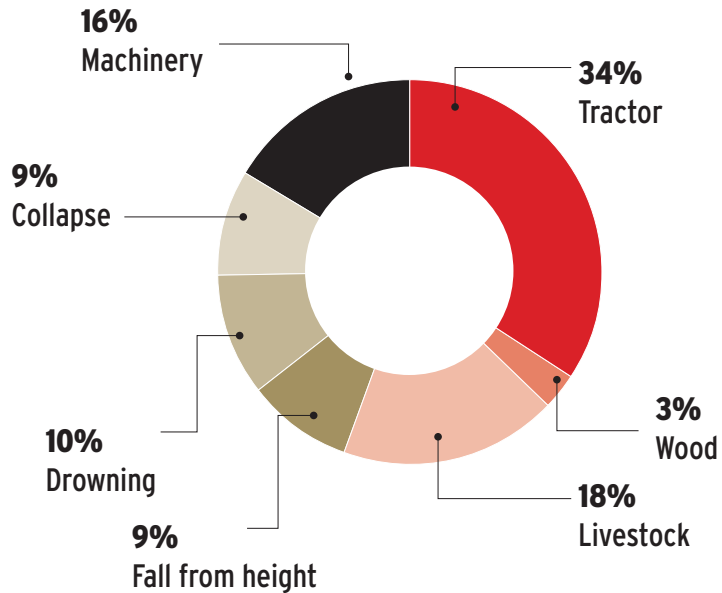
“ Children understand clear rules, not variations of rules. Implementing this ban on the farm may take some extra time and commitment, but I know from farmers' experience it has helped to reduce the instinct of children to run to the tractor without any thought to the potential danger

allowed in tractors. While this rule created some controversy when first introduced, the idea behind it has merit. Some may argue that the tractor is the safest place for their child, but it is the journey to the tractor which is the main cause for concern. The child has only one thing on their mind when they see the tractor and unfortunately it can be too late when the driver has spotted them.

Children understand clear rules, not variations of rules. Implementing this ban on the farm may take some extra time and commitment, but I know from farmers' experience it has helped to reduce the instinct of children to run to the tractor without any thought to the potential danger.

- **Reverse parking:** Reverse parking into any parking space is advisable. It considerably reduces the risk of colliding with someone or something when exiting later. Driving out from a parking position into a working area also offers the tractor driver improved visibility.
- **Loader:** Always leave the loader arm down when parked. Even with check valves and the locking mechanisms in place on modern tractors, it is always best practice to keep the loader in a lowered position when parked.
- **Training:** The HSA has a number of short e-learning courses available at [hsalearning.ie](http://hsalearning.ie), including a 40-minute course on tractor safety. This presentation is an excellent starting point when identifying the tractor hazards on your farm. The course also provides guidelines on putting safe work systems in place. You can test your knowledge with the questions on completion of the course. You could even encourage your family members to take

**Figure 1**  
Main causes of fatalities



Talk about machinery blind spots with your family and friends.

the course too and compare your grades. Teagasc provides half-day courses for clients and the general public on health and safety. Part of this course focuses on tractor safety and on completing the parts of the farm safety code of practice risk assessment document that are linked to the tractor. Contact your local Teagasc office for details.

Perhaps this month is a good time to assess your tractor habits, look at the

areas that are working well and build from there. Talk to neighbours; make tractor safety a topic at your next group meetings. Discussing safety and sharing ideas and experiences with your friends and neighbours is one of the best ways to spread good practice and recognise bad habits which are endangering lives.

No one wants to be meeting their friends and neighbours in a hospital or, God forbid, at a funeral. Change that habit, you will be glad you did.