

Landscape Safety Series: Tractor-Mower Safety¹

Lance Fluegel and Bradley Rein²

BEFORE USING THE MOWER

- Read or review the operator's manual to familiarize yourself with the machine.
- Learn the location and use of controls, gauges, and dials for the tractor.
- Familiarize yourself with speeds, slope capabilities, braking and steering characteristics, and tractor-mower clearances.
- Be sure the tractor is equipped with a roll-over protective structure (ROPS) and a seat belt. If not, have it retrofitted for one.
- Check that the power take off, mower input driveline, drive belts, chains, and gears are all properly guarded. Repair or replace if necessary.
- Check the discharge chute to see that it is present and pointed downward.
- Fill the fuel tank out of doors with the engine stopped and cool. Do not smoke while filling.
- If you will be driving on public roads be sure the slow moving vehicle (SMV) emblem is in place. Check that the warning lights are present and operating.
- Check overhead clearance of electrical wires and other obstructions, especially if you are using a wing-type, boom-type, or flail mower.

- Inspect the work area for debris, ditches, potholes, stumps, irrigation valves, etc. Clear removable items and mark the others.

OPERATING THE TRACTOR MOWER

- Be sure your hands and shoes are clean and dry before mounting the tractor to prevent slipping. Use the steps and handbars.
- Do not allow any riders -- especially children.
- Adjust the seat, fasten the seat belt, set the parking brake, place shift lever in neutral or park, and disengage the pto before cranking the engine.
- Raise the mower high and use low rpm before engaging power to the unit.
- Use a ground speed based on length and density of material being cut -- normally between 2-5 mph.
- Mow very tall grass twice at 90-degree angles if possible.
- Mow up and down slopes with rear-mount, pull-type, and wing-type mowers.
- Mow across slopes with side-mount, offset, and sicklebar mowers.
- Look behind you before backing.

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OTHER DO'S AND DON'TS

- When finished or stopping, disengage the pto, place shift in neutral or park, set parking brake, turn engine off, and wait for all movement to stop before dismounting.
- Remove the key if leaving the tractor for any length of time.
- Always block the mower if working under it for any reason.