

# Off-road vehicle safety:

## Utility terrain vehicles (UTVs)



Utility terrain vehicles (UTV) are useful tools to transport materials or people, or to access off-road sites. UTVs are becoming more common as they are considered a safer alternative to ATVs. They might be safer, but that doesn't mean they're risk-free; we're seeing more of them in workplaces so we're also seeing more UTV-related fatalities and serious injuries. **These can be avoided** by understanding the hazards and respecting the equipment. Use this checklist to help your operation keep people safe while using UTVs.

A UTV is a class IV ATV and is characterized by a steering wheel, nonstraddle seating, and a maximum width of 65 inches. You might also know a UTV as a "side-by-side" or by its name brand, such as a John Deere Gator or a Honda Pioneer. A UTV or side-by-side is a two- to six-person, four-wheel drive, off-road vehicle.

### Preventative measures

Ongoing maintenance for UTVs and equipping your UTV with the right gear and equipment is important.

- Create a maintenance schedule and checklist for your UTV.
- Check gas, brakes, and tires before using.

- Check seatbelt condition.
- Equip UTVs with Slow Moving Vehicle signs (SMV).
- Secure loads with ratchet straps or other securement devices.

Conduct a job hazard analysis to determine the appropriate PPE and control measures.

### Driving the UTV

- Don't use a UTV with brake, parking brake, or tire issues- tag out of service until repaired.
- If the UTV has a rollover protection structure (ROPS) or cab, wear your seatbelt.
- If the UTV **does not** have a ROPS or a cab, do not wear your seatbelt.
- Transport the same number of passengers as there are seatbelts or seats.
- Avoid sharp turns and sudden starts or stops.
- Maintain a safe speed; just because the UTV can go 50 mph doesn't mean it should on the farm, ranch, or worksite.

- When driving in fields or off-roading, slow down and look for ditches, holes, or other hazards.
- Secure all tools and equipment in the cab and in the bed.

### Customize your safety measures

- Review safety information about your specific UTV make and model with your team. Refer to the manufacturer's guidance for your specific model.
  - UTVs without powered steering can be more difficult to turn.
  - UTVs with a hydrostatic gas pedal can lurch and stop abruptly.
- Identify and fix UTV/ATV hazards on your property, such as hard-to-see wire gates, unexpected ditches or holes, and blind corners. Fix or flag those areas of your property.
- Enforce company-specific UTV safety policies including PPE use, speed, roads and areas that are off limits, and towing/load expectations.

### Employee training

Whatever their experience level, it's important to train all employees on how UTVs are used at your operation, because the expectations might be different from past jobs. Effective training tools and methods include:

- Walk around the UTV and identify safety features and what to check before and after use.
- Share policies and expectations related to speed, passengers, weight capacity, maintenance, and seat belts.
- Share near-misses and accidents regarding UTV use.
- Use a tailgate talk like this one: Safety talk | UTV safety ([saif.com/S1160](https://saif.com/S1160))

### Seatbelts

Because UTVs have widely replaced ATVs on the farm, people tend to think of them as large ATVs. But hazards associated with them make them more like a small pickup.

Like trucks or cars, the best safety measure is wearing your seatbelt. UTVs are safer because of ROPS, but if the seatbelt isn't worn, the benefit is lost. The purpose of the seatbelt is to keep the riders inside the ROPS or cab.

Always wear your seatbelt if you have ROPS on your UTV, especially when driving at higher speeds and over rough terrain.



### Tips to remember

- Don't allow anyone to ride in the cargo bed, stand on the running boards, sit on the hood, or other areas.
- If the driver or passengers are not wearing a seatbelt when driving a UTV with a hydrostatic pedal, it's not uncommon for them to hit their heads on the windshield or steering wheel.
- If children will be riding in a UTV, consider taking extra precautions to ensure their safety. Verify that the seatbelt fits correctly and evaluate whether they should wear additional PPE.
- Job hazard analysis: This means taking the time to think through the tasks and work environment to determine how to control hazards and risks.