

Essentials of Hayride Safety

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Hayrides are a popular and enjoyable attraction for agritainment visitors. However, hayrides can be extremely dangerous if not operated safely. Our research shows that over the past decade, hayride accidents have caused many serious injuries, including the death of at least fifteen people including ten children.

Over our company's 20 years of agritourism and agritainment consulting work, we have never visited an existing farm operation that was safely operating their hayrides. We have always made it our first priority with those clients to advise them on needed improvements to make their hayrides safe.

Here's a summary of essential safety procedures every farm that operates a hayride should follow:

- The hayride trail should be kept smooth, as depressions and ruts can cause wagons to grab hold and jerk, bouncing guests around. All trees and bushes along the trail need to be trimmed, so riders won't be hit by branches.
- Tractors and hay wagons should be thoroughly inspected at the beginning of each day.
- All wagons must have a safety chain connecting the wagon's front axle to the tractor's draw bar or rear axle.
- For adequate traction and braking, the tractor pulling the hayride must weigh more than the gross weight of the wagon it pulls when full of people.
- The hay wagon must have railings and seating. Enclosure railings should be designed to prevent children from crawling through the railings. The front railing must be adequately tall and sturdy to prevent anyone from falling forward out of the wagon and being run over. The loading opening on the wagon should have a gate or enclosure that is kept shut.
- The loading area should have a sign stating the safety rules for passengers.
- Training is essential for all staff involved. All tractor drivers should be trained in the operation of the tractor they will be driving, including how to properly start and stop smoothly. Just because an employee knows how to drive a tractor does not mean they understand how to drive a hayride. All employees who will be responsible for loading, unloading and supervising hayrides must also be trained. There should be a pocket size checklist of all procedures that each loading area staff keeps with them.
- All wagons should have a tour guide riding in the wagon who has two-way radio communication with the tractor driver. Tractor noise prevents a driver from hearing anything shouted from the wagon if there is a problem.
- Tractors should have rearview mirrors that give a full view of the wagon.
- The hayride route should have barricade fencing along its route wherever it is in or near areas where visitors will be, so there is no possibility of anyone, especially children, wandering into the path of the hayride. At the loading and unloading areas, the fencing should have gates that are operated only by the loading/unloading staff.

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- There should be well-organized loading and unloading procedures.
- Separate unloading and loading areas.
- Only after the tractor comes to a stop in the unloading area, is put in neutral and the brake engaged, should the unloading staff open the wagon gate and assist people off.
- Once a wagon is unloaded, the barricade exit gate should be closed, the unloading staff should inspect the wagon for lost items, eyeball the tire inflation on the wagons and tractor, inspect around and under the wagon to make sure there are no people or children, and only then should the tractor driver be signaled to proceed to the loading area.
- The barricade gate at the loading area should not be opened until the tractor is at a stop, put in neutral and the brakes engaged.
- Once the wagon is loaded, the barricade loading gate should be closed, the wagon gate should be closed, safety instructions recited to the riders, riders checked to make sure all are seated, the area around and under the wagon inspected to make sure there are no people or children, the pins and safety chains on the wagons checked and only then should the tractor driver be signaled to proceed.
- Ideally, communication between the loading and unloading staff and the driver should be via two-way radio

communication. Otherwise, the driver's go-signal should be one that is visual, crystal clear and not mistakable.

- Public road travel should be avoided. If necessary, there should be escort vehicles with proper safety lighting at the lead and following the wagon.
- Due to the hazardous nature of hayrides, children's field trip hayrides should have higher adult to child ratios than for the classroom. The following are recommended:

Recommended Adult to Child Ratios for Hayrides	
Children's Ages	Adult to Child Ratio
2	1:3
3-4	1:4
5-9	1:6
10-17	1:10

Hayrides are a great fun attraction for agritainment visitors. Just make sure you take the time and effort to operate yours safely. 🌻

