

ALL-TERRAIN VEHICLE (ATV) SAFETY

When operated safely, an ATV can provide a useful resource for work on the farm or ranch, as well as a source of fun and recreation. The popularity of ATVs has grown steadily throughout the last two decades. Unfortunately, reported cases of serious injuries and deaths have increased, along with the popularity of ATVs.

What is an ATV? An all-terrain vehicle (ATV) is a motorized vehicle with oversized, low-pressure tires designed for off-road use. They can weigh anywhere from 100 to 600 pounds and can travel at speeds up to 75 miles per hour.

Three or four wheels? Most ATVs have four wheels. Three-wheelers have not been manufactured for years because it was discovered that three-wheeler operators were twice as likely to be injured than four-wheeler operators. In 1988, the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) and ATV distributors signed a 10-year consent decree with ATV manufacturers to:

- Ban sales of three-wheeled ATVs.
- Offer free training courses for new ATV operators.
- Prevent sales of adult-sized ATVs for use by youth under 16.
- Ensure that prospective ATV buyers receive safety warnings.
- Develop voluntary standards to make ATVs safer.

What risks are associated with ATV use? The CPSC reported 3,716 deaths from 1982-1999 in the United States (35% were under the age of 16 and 15% were under the age of 12). In the same time period, the CPSC reported 84,800 emergency room-treated injuries (40% of those were under the age of 16). In recent years, ATV-related deaths and injuries have declined slightly in general, but have increased for the under-16 age group.

General guidelines. ATV distributors and several safety organizations recommend the following general guidelines:

- Children 6-11 years of age should not operate an ATV larger than 50cc.
- Children 12-16 years of age should not operate an ATV larger than 90cc.
- Adult-sized ATVs (90cc & larger) should be operated only by individuals 16 years and older.

Safety tips for ATV use

- Don't let children under 16 ride adult-sized ATVs.
- Always wear a helmet, eye protection, and protective clothing.
- Don't carry passengers.
- Attend an ATV-operator training course.
- Don't ride on paved roads; ATVs are difficult to control on pavement.
- Riding and alcohol/drugs don't mix.
- Avoid excessive speed. Travel at speeds appropriate for the terrain and conditions.
- Read the owner's manual.
- Do a pre-ride safety check (tires, wheels, chain, cables)
- Consult your State's DNR (Department of Natural Resources) for local regulations.

For additional information, check out these sources:

- Consumer Product Safety Council: www.cpsc.gov
- Your state's Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
- ATV Safety Institute Rider Course: 800-887-2887
- National Safety Council: 630-775-2023, www.nsc.org
- 4H Community Safety: atvsafety@fourhcouncil.edu

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