

From the Office of the Sheriff:

The Dodge County Fair is over, the displays are gone, the animals are back on the farm, our children are readying themselves for the start of the school year and soon the farmers will begin harvesting their crops. So let's talk about school buses, tractors, and combines.

Every year the Sheriff's Department works closely with school bus companies and their drivers. This effort includes a review of traffic rules and regulation, all motor vehicle laws as well as the process of reporting violators of State Statutes. Statute 346.46 (2m) requires all traffic to stop at school crossings that are controlled by a crossing guard. 346.48 requires traffic approaching from the front or rear to stop for a school bus which is stopped and displaying red flashing lights. You are required to stop no less than 20' from the bus and remain stopped until the bus resumes motion or extinguishes the red flashing lights. (not applicable on divided highways). A very important part of each of these statutes is that once a report is filed by a crossing guard or bus driver, the citation can be written to the registered owner and the fact that the owner was not the operator at the time of the offense is not a defense to the citation. Fines range from \$150 - \$300. Please help keep our school bus drivers and their passenger's safe by adhering to these traffic laws.

Farm implements or "implements of husbandry" as they are referred to in state statutes have many of the same rights you do as the driver of a car or truck. We can all remember the days when most tractors or wagons had a slow moving vehicle sign dangling on the back as the only early warning sign of a slow moving tractor and wagon. Times have changed. Today we see modern equipment such as headlights, tail lights, turn signals and more on farm tractors and associated machinery. It is important as joint users of our town, county, and state roadways that we respect each others rights to be on the same road at the same time. Yes, at times these farm implements can be slow, some are very wide, and often they are in the lane of traffic when "you" think they should be operating on the shoulder.

The truth is the operators of these pieces of very expensive machinery just want to get from point "a" to point "b" in a safe manner. This will require fellow motorists to be patient and understanding. Requiring them to use the shoulder vs. the roadway can be more dangerous as we know motorist that see ½ a passing lane will try to use it. I would rather the motorist wait until a clear passing zone which will allow for the safe overtaking of the implement. Just because a tractor is operating on a shoulder does not mean he may not make a left turn. We must watch out for equipment turning into field drives. As many of these pieces of equipment host turn signals some do not, others pull machinery that may be so wide you can not clearly see the directional. Again, we must be patient when farm machinery.

Even more so, we must be vigilant during hours of darkness when tractors and trucks are exiting fields with their harvest. Often the ditches are used for staging areas and unless the truck trailers have side marker lights you may not notice them entering the roadway from the fields. We also will field dozens of calls from concerned motorists regarding mud and manure on the roadways. We do respond and we do consult with the party responsible to ensure they cleanup the roadway upon completion of their work. In closing, when it comes to school buses and children as well as farmers and their machinery, please be patient and understanding, this will equate to a safe Fall for all of us. Thanks for listening, tnhls@co.dodge.wi.us

