

**Instructor Notes:** Building on last month's topic, which discussed the hazards of urban driving, this month we will cover the hazards associated with driving on rural roadways and how they compare. Whether you operate in a rural area or simply visit from time-to-time, it is equally important to talk about the risks of rural driving and what your drivers can do to be as safe as possible.

# Safety Meeting 2016 #2 – The Hazards of Rural Driving

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**D**riving conditions in rural areas differ significantly from those in urban areas, primarily because there is less traffic. Yet rural areas are statistically more deadly. In fact, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, for the last three decades more than half of the roadway fatalities occur in rural areas compared with urban areas. With that in mind, the following are hazards and driving challenges to think about the next time you are driving in a rural area, on a “country” road.

## Hidden Hazards

Unmarked field and farm driveways are often hidden because of crops, bushes or trees. Always keep a lookout for these hidden hazards as they can become “instant intersections.” Blind curves and dips are also rural driving hazards since the road typically follows the landscape resulting in many dips and rises that create obstructed views. When entering a blind curve, stay as far right as possible.

## Reduce Speeds

Some drivers feel they can speed on rural roads because they think the chance of being caught by the police is lower but driving above the speed limit anywhere is dangerous. Something else to consider is how the posted speed limit may dramatically drop as the road passes through a small community. Roadside stands, gas stations, restaurants, grocery stores, rural attractions and local events often create hazards of vehicles slowing down to stop or slow moving vehicles entering the roadway. In either case, reduce your speed and stop as needed.

**28** towtimes.com • February 2016

## Rough Roads

Rural roadways are often rough semi-permanent roads designed for slower speeds. These roads are paved with various materials like asphalt, crushed stone, etc. Fresh tar is often spread over gravel when patching a rural roadway. Proceed with care to avoid throwing tar on your vehicle and stay back from any traffic in front of you to avoid flying gravel. Most rural roadways are maintained less frequently and may suffer from “washboards” (i.e., evenly spaced horizontal bumps or ruts) caused by fast moving vehicles. If you encounter a washboard in the road, slow down as you may lose traction and control of your vehicle. Another byproduct of gravel roads is dust. Be careful when driving through dust as it may obstruct your view for longer than you may expect.

## Unforgiving Roadways

Urban areas often have engineered safety devices built into the roadway that rural roads may not. Some of these urban safety features include curbs, marked shoulders with rumble-strips, guardrails, median dividers, etc. To make matters worse, rural roadways are sometimes narrower than urban expressways, creating passing hazards in addition to having soft, unmarked shoulders (compacted gravel or dirt). Avoid driving on rural shoulders unless necessary and use extra caution if you must.

## Animals in the Roadway

Animals present a particularly dangerous situation on rural roads. To begin with, they're totally unpredictable.

Whether it's a cow, a horse or a deer, you never know when the animal might spook and dart in front of your tow truck. If you hit a large animal at high speeds it can result in major vehicle damage and possibly cause serious injury or death to you and the animal. When passing animals close to the roadway, slow down. If they are in the roadway, stop until it is safe to proceed.

## No Sidewalks

Since there are almost never sidewalks along rural roadways, you have to be alert for pedestrians walking on or across the road, or horseback riders.

## Slow-moving Equipment

Slow-moving farm equipment is another element common to rural roads. Because they usually are traveling at much slower speeds, it's tempting to pass them but may not be the safest maneuver. Remember, you never pass when there's a solid yellow line in your lane, or on any stretch of road where your visibility is impaired. The best thing to do in this situation is just wait it out. Farm equipment usually isn't traveling far, generally just from one field to the next. So be patient. It's not worth risking a head-on collision just to save a couple of minutes on the road.

*This list of rural driving safety tips is not all-inclusive. Discuss other problems or hazards you may encounter in the rural areas near you and learn from each other's experiences.*