



ATV SAFETY

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All-terrain vehicle usage is at an all-time high. They can be used for all types of tasks and jobs in city, urban, and woodland environments. From simple transportation, to hauling, to more specialized tasks, these versatile machines make the modern woodland farm more efficient and productive. Forest landowners employ all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) to inspect property, do property maintenance, aid in management work, and many other activities. Several companies have joined in the market to produce ATVs to meet the needs of any and all users.

While versatile, ATVs pose a safety hazard if they are not operated properly. Although the most common use is recreational, the ATV is not a toy. It is a powerful motorized vehicle. Many models weigh over 600 pounds and have the capability of traveling over 60 miles per hour. Even the best-trained individuals lose control of their ATVs. A collision or rollover can happen quickly at high rates of speed. These accidents often result in severe or debilitating injuries, even death. Some of the most common contributors to injuries include not wearing a helmet, carrying one or more passengers, lack of mature judgment, lack of adequate strength and coordination, and an ATV that is too big for the rider's size and age. According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, there were 214 deaths reported in Alabama between 1982 and 2006.

Protective gear, inspections, and proper handling can reduce ATV hazards for operators in the field of forestry. Protective gear keeps the rider safe and in control of the ATV. The ATV Safety Institute recommends that riders use motorcycle helmets that are certified by the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) and/or the Snell Memorial Foundation. Helmets certified for ATV use provide head protection and cut the death risk by half. They should be secure and impact resistant, yet still allow peripheral vision. A helmet face shield, goggles, or glasses protect the eyes from flying dirt, rocks, insects, or vegetation. Gloves and boots protect the hands and feet, and allow the rider to maintain a firm grip and control over the ATV. Long sleeves and pants protect exposed skin.

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Before riding, learn how to properly use all the mechanical controls and safety devices of the vehicle. Read the owner's manual. Maintenance and pre-use inspections should be performed prior to any use of an ATV. Tires should be in good condition and maintained at the manufacturer's recommended air pressure. The ATV should have adequate oil and fuel levels. The chain, chassis, nuts, and other connections should be checked and secured. Brakes, controls, and cables should be functional, properly adjusted, and operate smoothly.

Preventing serious injury starts with training. ATV riders with at least one year of experience have a much lower risk of injury than new riders. However, training can bridge the gap. Most importantly, all ATV riders should take a hands-on ATV safety course from a certified instructor. These courses are offered by the ATV Safety Institute, local ATV rider groups, and agencies responsible for regulating their own ATV use. The National 4-H Council also sponsors educational seminars on safe riding for children and teenagers. Learning to drive an ATV safely can be a challenge, but proper fundamentals will help the rider maintain control of the ATV. Good training teaches new riders how to handle many different riding situations, and helps to aid in judgment of the individual's capabilities and the limitations of the ATV.

All riders need practice and instruction on ATV handling techniques prior to field use. Learn how to shift your weight and maintain speed during turns and uphill/downhill maneuvers. When riding, scan ahead and to the side for obstacles, uneven

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terrain, other vehicles, people, and animals. Reduce speed to at least 15 miles per hour if you see a potential hazard. Pay attention to hazards such as guy wires and barbed wire fences; they are low profile and difficult to see. Never ride on a public road except to cross it. If you must cross a road; use extreme caution. Remember that ATVs are low to the ground and may not be visible to other vehicles. Lights, reflectors, and flags can make the ATV easier to see.

Remember to heed the warnings posted on the ATV. Don't carry passengers on ATVs that are designed for single individual usage. Finally, never operate an ATV that is too large or powerful for your capabilities.

For more all-terrain vehicle safety information, to take a hands-on ATV RiderCourseSM, or to enroll in a free online e-course, visit the All-Terrain Vehicle Safety InstituteSM (ASI) website at www.atvsafety.org or call (800) 887-2887. 

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