

Date: 27<sup>th</sup> August 2015

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Take extra care on rural roads during harvest season**

**The Safer Roads Partnership, Warwickshire Police and West Mercia Police are warning motorists of the dangers that may be present at this time of year as farmers are using the roads more when harvesting and moving their produce.**

Agriculture is one of our region's key industries and this time of year is very busy in the farming calendar with many crops requiring harvest and transportation, often within a short window of opportunity in order to ensure consumers can enjoy the produce in prime condition. However, this burst of activity traditionally sees a rise in road collisions, many of which are preventable.

A significant proportion of the collisions involving agricultural vehicles occur on rural roads with 60mph speed limits, and many near turnings into farms. The typical causes of the collisions are poor overtaking manoeuvres and inappropriate speed, with drivers finding themselves unable to stop in time when presented with a slow moving or wide vehicle.

A further hazard is caused by mud and debris being brought onto the roads by tractors and other vehicles that have been working in the fields. In the last three years\*, there have been 75 collisions across Warwickshire and West Mercia where mud was recorded as a contributory factor.

Under the Highways Act (1980), farmers and contractors have a legal obligation to ensure their vehicles are cleared of any mud or debris before entering the public highway. Excess mud on the road is a danger to cars, motorbikes and cyclists and can change the way a vehicle handles, causing skidding, especially in wet conditions.

Sergeant Andy Wortley, Operational Patrol Unit, Warwickshire Police and West Mercia Police said: "Every year we face problems with agricultural vehicles leaving large amounts of mud and debris on the roads during the harvest season. In a rural county such as Herefordshire, this can present a very real danger.

"One particular example in the county involved a road traffic collision where a vehicle had left the road and overturned, due to excessive quantities of mud on the road. The mud had been compressed by vehicle traffic and made worse by weather conditions, making the road surface extremely dangerous. Fortunately there were no serious injuries but it could have been a very

different outcome. The farmer and his workers were traced and prosecuted for the offence at Hereford Magistrates Court.

“While the majority of farmers and contractors take steps to ensure they keep the roads clear and safe, not all are as diligent. The agricultural industry sits at the heart of rural Herefordshire and we appreciate that the harvest season is a busy and challenging period. However, farmers and contractors must be aware of their responsibilities under the Highways Act and ensure they do not leave the roads in an unacceptable state which puts other road users at risk. We have already taken action against offenders who haven’t complied with this legislation and will continue to take a tough stance against anyone who we believe is being reckless and irresponsible.

“We also encourage other road users to report any incidents of mud on the roads promptly to the police, so this can be dealt with accordingly.”

Anna Higgins, Communications Manager at the Safer Roads Partnership, said: "Although many drivers of agricultural vehicles use the roads in a responsible way, we are reminding them to be aware of the impact they can have and consider other road users while they undertake their work. During busy traffic periods, pull into a lay-by or safe place to allow other vehicles to pass safely, to avoid traffic build-up and prevent unsafe overtaking manoeuvres.

“We would also like to remind general motorists that extra care and patience should be taken during the harvest season when there is a necessity for more agricultural vehicles to be on the roads. While it can be frustrating travelling behind an agricultural vehicle it’s not worth getting impatient and putting yourself and other road users at risk with dangerous manoeuvres.”

Drivers of agricultural vehicles or anyone wishing to report any issues regarding debris or mud on the road can contact Herefordshire Council Highways on 01432 261 800

**- ENDS -**

\* Three year period refers to January 2012 – December 2014. During this period, there were 62 collisions in West Mercia and 13 collisions in Warwickshire where mud was recorded as a contributory factor.

If you would like to arrange an interview with a spokesperson please contact Anna Higgins on 01905 331248.

#### **Notes to editor**

The Safer Roads Partnership is part of Warwickshire Police and West Mercia Police and works in partnership with the four local highway authorities in West Mercia (Herefordshire Council, Shropshire Council, Telford & Wrekin Council and Worcestershire County Council); Warwickshire County Council, the Highways Agency; HM Courts Service - West Mercia; Fire & Rescue Services for Hereford & Worcester, Shropshire and Warwickshire; and West Mercia Cluster of Primary Care Trusts.



Follow us on Twitter **@ThinkSaferRoads**