



Hayrides – Best Practices

Hayrides are enjoyable activities where individuals of all ages can partake. While it is exciting to participate in seasonal events, safety must become a priority when using large equipment and motorized vehicles. When good safety practices are ignored, a fun hayride can turn tragic. Proper planning and attention to safety practices can help prevent an injury or tragic event from occurring.


When organizing a hayride, planning and safety guidelines should focus on three key areas: the participants, the driver, and the moving vehicle (towing vehicle and wagon). Establish guidelines for riders. Take time to evaluate the wagon to determine how many people can ride in it safely. At a minimum, the wagon's size and capacity, the participants' weight, height, and age should all be taken into consideration when determining how many people should be permitted to sit in the wagon while moving. Ensure that all participants fit comfortably within the wagon's side rail enclosure, with ample room to remain comfortably seated throughout the ride. Other factors that need to be taken into consideration include:

Supervision - An adequate number of responsible adult(s) should be present on the wagon. An adult must accompany riders age 12 and under. Riders should be given clear safety instructions before the hayride starts. Instructions should include that everyone needs to remain seated for the entire ride. Riders need to keep their hands, arms, and legs inside the wagon at all times (a sign should be posted in the seating area or wagon area also when possible). Rowdy conduct should be corrected immediately. The tractor driver and the riders should be able to communicate with one another.

Equipment - The tractor or towing vehicle and the wagon should be in good repair. The wagon should be clean and equipped with side walls/rails that are high enough to prevent people from falling off the wagon when seated—usually 42” minimum in height. Sturdy side rails also offer back support for seated passengers. Loose hay should not be used. Two wagons should not be hitched together. Ensure the hitch attaching the tractor to the wagon is properly secured with a well-designed hitch pin and safety chains. It is highly desirable to use a chain as a secondary backup to connect the wagon to the tractor/towing vehicle. The pulling vehicle should be large enough to pull the loaded weight of the wagon safely.

Loading and Unloading of Passengers – Operators need to ensure that the pick-up and drop off location is a safe distance away from the patrons who are waiting to ride on the wagon. The wagon or the loading and unloading area should have steps that are designed to assist passengers who are entering and exiting the wagon, and adequate lighting should be supplied at all locations. An attendant should be present to assist the passengers onto and off of the wagon. Careful attention while conducting inspections, should include but not be limited to missing parts, loose or missing boards, exposed nails / screws or any other sharp edges that may cause cuts, scrapes or wounds. A visual inspection of the tires on the tow vehicle and the wagon should be conducted before every ride. Tire inflation rates should be checked before the first ride of the day. It is recommended that the municipality confers with their municipal solicitor regarding any requirements for ADA access.

Driver - The driver should be experienced in driving the tractor/pick up while pulling a wagon. The driver should have a written checklist of all safety precautions, and he/she should review them before beginning the hayride. The driver should be a responsible adult with familiarity and training with vehicles and attached wagons



Route - The route should be selected in advance and fully inspected for hazards before the first ride of the day. The driver(s) should practice driving the route with the wagon before the hayride. Avoid the use of busy roads or roads that are too bumpy or have steep grades. Low speeds should be used at all times. Check for overhead wires that may interfere with the wagon, and determine whether an emergency vehicle would be able to travel the same path if necessary.

Seating - No rider should be seated in such a manner that any part of the body can extend past the sides, back, or front of the wagon. Riders should remain seated inside the wagon at all times. Arms, head, and legs should be kept inside the wagon.

Lighting and Visibility - Lighting is a critical safety factor for hayrides that occur at night. The tractor pulling the wagon should have the headlights on, the warning hazard lights on, and lights on the back that illuminate the wagon. Adult volunteer(s) riding on the wagon should have flashlights ready for use if needed.

Using a public roadway for any portion of the trip is strongly discouraged. The tractor and wagon are farm vehicles, but in this case, they are being used to move passengers. Title 39 of the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Code may apply if farm vehicles are used to transport passengers on a roadway.

If the route requires a road crossing, safety precautions must be taken. If the route is on any public roadway (for any portion of the trip), a trail car can follow the wagon at a safe distance with the vehicle following the wagon having the vehicle's headlights on the wagon. We recommend that you consult with your local law enforcement agency for assistance.

Parking Area- Parking areas should be kept separate as not to cause any distraction or interference. Attention should be directed toward surface hazards and routinely monitored for deficiencies. Adequate illumination and signage should be present, which includes ingress and egress routes. Attendants must wear reflective parking vests and be equipped with flashlights and/or illuminated wands.

Communication - The driver, a supervisor on the wagon, and the driver of the car following the wagon should use two-way radios or another form of direct communication to stay in contact with one another. The driver should have a spotter that can relay information as warranted, such as the need to stop. A cell phone should be available in case a need arises for emergency assistance.

Emergency Procedures - A first aid kit should be present along with individual(s) who are trained in rendering first aid. If an injury should occur, the person rendering first aid, along with the injured person, will need to determine if additional EMS Services need to be summoned to the scene. All injury incidents should be documented, and the event manager notified. Organizers should have a written emergency action plan in place. Drivers and attendants should carry cell phones for emergencies. The towing vehicle should be equipped with a fire extinguisher and flashlight.

Special Events- Public entities may contract for these services. The Municipality should require that all third-party contractors or groups organizing these activities for them complete an application for a special event if necessary.

Special events have many benefits to the municipality and its residents. They also present many challenges to the community. Overcoming these challenges starts with a good plan and organization. Involve all stakeholders early to minimize surprises. Your Joint Insurance Fund Administration, Safety Director, and Risk Manager are ready to help.

Insurance and Liability Concerns - Consult with your Municipal Solicitor and your Risk Management Consultants regarding insurance requirements and options.
