Agriculture remains one of the more dangerous occupations in North America. But exercising caution, getting rest and being safety-minded can go a long way toward making it safer for everyone involved, the Nebraska Corn Board said in noting that Sept. 16-22 is National Farm Safety and Health Week.

"As the long hours of harvest begin, we need to be safety minded to prevent an injury or fatality that could have been prevented by taking appropriate precautions," said Tim Scheer, chairman of the Nebraska Corn Board and farmer from St. Paul. "Precautions such as staying focused and resting regularly can keep things safe around the farm for everyone, including family members helping to bring the crop in."

This year's focus for Farm Safety Week is the farm family with the theme of Agriculture Safety & Health…A Family Affair. The National Education Center for Agricultural Safety, which promotes National Farm Safety and Health Week, said there were 596 deaths and 70,000 disabling injuries attributed to agriculture in 2010.

"Grain production and handling continues to be one of the most dangerous aspects of crop production," Scheer said. "There are more than 1 billion bushels of on-farm storage capacity across Nebraska and grain bins and associated equipment are common on farms and deserve extra attention."

Scheer also cautioned motorists driving on rural roads during harvest. Such roads see additional traffic during harvest, which increases the chances for accidents to occur between slower moving farm equipment and vehicles moving at highway speeds.

In addition, rural intersections will have heavier-than-normal travel and the dry conditions increase dust which limit visibility, as can sun glare in the morning and evening.

Standing crops in the field may also block a clear view of oncoming traffic.

The Nebraska Corn Board encourages farmers, their families and employees to pay special attention to the safety features of their equipment, and encourages everyone to keep an eye toward safety on the highways and byways this harvest and year round.

Some things to consider for farmers and farm workers while on the farm this fall:

• Ensure that trained family members and employees are operating powerful equipment.

• Develop a set of safety rules that everyone should follow – and enforce them. Also consider developing an emergency plan so everyone is on the same page.

• Check that PTOs are well protected to avoid contact with clothing or people during operation.

• Check to make sure safety shields are in place on all equipment everyday – they are there for a reason.

• Always be aware of power lines that can come in contact with moving equipment and augers around grain bins.

• Grain bins deserve special attention and caution when grain is being loaded and removed. Safety measures should be put in place to avoid any risk of entrapment and suffocation.

• Take periodic breaks to help avoid fatigue. Take a rest break for a few minutes, go for a short walk or check in with family members.

• Use extra caution when backing equipment. It is easy to overlook something or more importantly, someone, especially a child.

• Protective eye and ear wear is important in many situations.

• Remind family members and workers that safe practices come before expedience.

"Additionally, with the extreme drought the risk of fire has been greatly elevated," Scheer said.

“So please be extra careful, conduct routine maintenance, don’t allow leaves and stover to build up and have a fire extinguisher inside the cab.”