

Keeping it safe

When purchasing or renting a new utility vehicle most people look at performance, features and price. Chances are safety features are not at the top of the list - but they should be.

Selecting utility vehicles that emphasize safety can reduce the risk of workplace accidents, and might actually save your organization some money. Unfortunately, safety features vary greatly on today's models so you'll need to do your homework to find the best utility vehicle for your applications.

The use of utility vehicles at work is still relatively new - so new that the government has yet to develop many safety standards governing their design and operation. But that hasn't stopped many of the leading manufacturers from incorporating enhanced safety features into their designs.

According to Tony Wixo, product manager for Polaris' Professional Series line of commercial-grade utility vehicles, the most significant safety feature a manufacturer can add to its vehicles is Roll Over Protection Structure (ROPS) certification. Sometimes simply referred to as a roll bar or roll cage, ROPS protects a utility vehicle's occupants in the event the vehicle should roll over as a result of careless operation.

Additional vehicle features that can greatly improve vehicle safety include a reverse signal alarm that is audible over the surrounding noise, and brake lights that can be seen regardless of light conditions.

Once you've selected a utility vehicle equipped with all the safety features needed for your use, experts recommend instituting written policies that govern the vehicle's operation. Only designated employees should be allowed to drive utility vehicles and it's recommended that all operators go through some form of training before getting behind the wheel.

All utility vehicle operators should have a valid driver's license. Require your employees to notify a supervisor if their license is ever suspended or revoked, and periodically check records as an added safeguard.

Equipping your staff with the right utility vehicles for the job and properly managing the safe use of the vehicles can result in improved efficiency without the risk of increased accidents.

- Steve Rudolph

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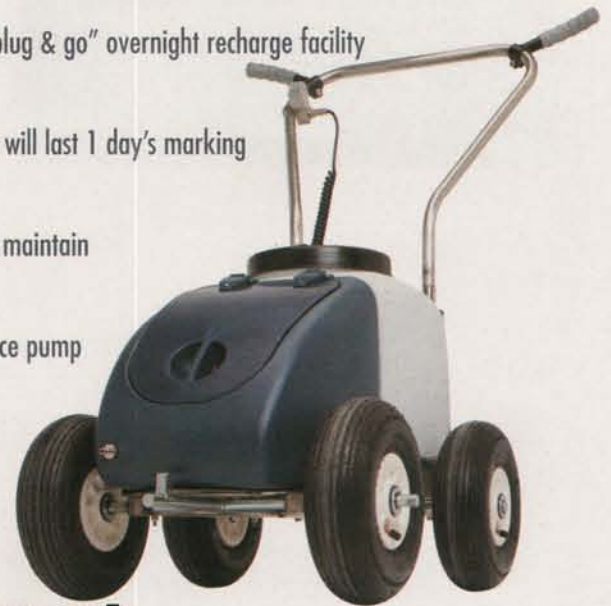
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