



PHILLIPS COUNTY EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT NEWSLETTER

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Celebrate with Fireworks Safely

Complacency is the biggest danger when handling consumer explosives, as a single mistake can permanently alter a family's life. Data tracked by the [U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission \(CPSC\)](#) shows thousands of emergency room visits annually, with the vast majority stemming from the unexpected ignition of devices or basic user error.



Fireworks Gone Wrong

The Face-Shattering Misfire: At 26 years old, Noel Diaz was lighting fireworks with family when a sudden spark jumped early from his lighter. Before he could move away, the device detonated directly in his face. The explosion ripped his hat in half, caused 14 nasal fractures, and completely destroyed the whites of his eyes, leaving him permanently blind in his right eye.

Safety Tips

- Never hold a lit firework in your hand, and never place any part of your body directly over a device while lighting the fuse.
- Light one at a time, and back away to a safe perimeter immediately after the fuse catches.
- Never try to re-light a "dud" firework that failed to launch; let it sit untouched for 20 minutes, then submerge it completely in a bucket of water.
- Clear the overhead zone of all tree branches, power lines, and structural overhangs that could deflect an aerial shell.
- Maintain a 50-foot distance from homes, dry brush, vehicles, and flammable structures.
- Keep a garden hose or water bucket fully prepped and running nearby before you strike the first match.
- Soak all debris—both spent casings and unexploded duds—in water for several hours before discarding them into a household trash bin.

Outdoor Grilling Safe Practices

- Only use grills outdoors in well-ventilated areas.
- Avoid locations such as inside a garage, or under covered eaves, to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Establish a three-foot "safety zone" to keep kids and pets away.
- Open the lid before lighting.
- Check propane tank hoses for leaks or blockages before use.
- Let coals cool completely in a metal container with a lid before disposing of them.
- Clean the grill regularly to remove grease or fat buildup that causes flare-ups.
- Keep a fire extinguisher or garden hose nearby.

Preparing for El Niño

The National Weather Service forecasts the potential for El Niño conditions in the coming months. El Niño is a naturally occurring climate event that is characterized by warmer-than-average ocean temperatures in the Pacific Ocean. This can lead to a higher likelihood of hotter temperatures, increased rainfall, flooding, and coastal erosion during the fall and winter months. The National Weather Service (NWS) has a page dedicated to El Nino-La Nina with related information and updates.

Kansas is the land where it can rain all day and still stay dry, and where a person can stand in mud up to their knees while dust blows into their eyes.



The Great Grasshopper Plague of 1874

The summer of 1874 is etched forever into Kansas history as a literal nightmare. Following a hot, dry spring, billions of **Rocky Mountain locusts** descended on the state without warning.

- **Blatting Out the Sun:** The swarms were so massive and dense that they completely blocked out the sun for up to six hours at a time, looking like giant, dark storm clouds.
- **Eating the Clothes Off Your Back:** The locusts did not just eat the wheat and corn fields down to the dirt. Once the vegetation was gone, they chewed through wood fences, the leather harnesses on horses, paper, tree bark, and the wooden handles of shovels. Pioneers reported that if you stood outside, the locusts would literally chew the wool off live sheep and eat the clothing right off your body.
- **Derailing Heavy Steam Trains:** The infestation was so thick on the ground that it stopped the industrial supply chain. As trains tried to push down the tracks, the weight of the locomotives crushed millions of grasshoppers. The accumulation of insect grease made the iron rails so incredibly slick that train wheels spun in place, completely halting rail travel across the state.

Farm Equipment & Highways

A car traveling at highway speeds will close the distance to a slow-moving tractor in a matter of seconds, turning a lack of driver attention into a fatal collision. According to rural road safety data, the closing speed between a standard vehicle traveling at 55 mph and a combine harvester traveling at 15 mph is roughly 60 feet per second. If a driver is distracted for just a few seconds, a collision is nearly inevitable.

The Left-Turn Illusion: A driver became frustrated trailing a large tractor on a two-lane county road. Seeing the tractor slow down and hug the right shoulder, the driver assumed the farmer was pulling over to let them pass. The driver accelerated to overtake on the left—just as the tractor swung hard to the left to execute a wide turn into a field hidden by tall corn. The car slammed directly into the tractor's massive side wheel, flipping the car and severely injuring the driver.

Speed and Distance

- **Brake immediately** the second you spot a flashing amber hazard lights ahead.
- **Maintain a 50-foot following distance** at a minimum. Tailgating blinds you to oncoming road hazards and places you squarely in the farmer's massive rear blind spots.
- **Assume the farmer cannot see you** if you cannot see the side mirrors or the operator inside the cab.

Passing Protocols

- **Never mistake a wide right swing for an invitation to pass.** Large machinery must swing far to the right side of the road or shoulder to safely clear mailboxes, signs, and deep ditches before making a sharp left turn into a field.
- **Verify the left turn signals** or hand gestures before making any move around the machine.
- **Strictly obey no-passing zones.** Never attempt to pass farm machinery on a hill, around a curve, near a bridge, or within 100 feet of an intersection.

Sharing Narrow Spaces

- **Yield the right-of-way** when meeting extra-wide equipment traveling in the opposite direction.
- **Pull onto the shoulder** or into a safe turnout to let the machine pass, as top-heavy farm machinery cannot safely navigate soft, steep road ditches.
- **Watch for tall crops** (like corn) at rural intersections, which completely block cross-traffic visibility and require you to stop and look twice before proceeding.



There's nothing between Kansas and the North Pole but a three-strand barbed-wire fence, and someone left the gate open.