

Environment aware:

Navigating gravel and unpaved roads

Use this guide to help lead a discussion with employees to raise awareness about the potential hazards when navigating gravel and unpaved roads. Empower them with strategies to minimize risks and become safer drivers. Use the form on Page 2 to record meeting details.

According to the Federal Highway Administration, approximately 1.3 million miles of unpaved roads exist in the United States, accounting for 35 percent of the nation's total roadway mileage. While some unpaved roads are well-maintained, many pose risks to drivers. Here are the key hazards associated with unpaved and gravel roads:

1 Dust hazards:

Dust hazards on gravel roads are particularly pronounced during dry weather. Excessive dust impairs visibility, making it challenging to see the road and other vehicles. When following another vehicle on a gravel road, reducing speed allows the dust to settle, improving visibility.

2 Narrow roads and vegetation:

Gravel roads are often narrow and lack shoulders, which can be a hazard for ag equipment, slower moving vehicles, or other vehicles coming up next to them. In addition, vegetation growth alongside the road may further narrow the roadway and impact visibility. To mitigate this, drivers may need to cautiously drive more toward the center of the road to maintain essential sight distance.

3 Washboarding effect:

Washboarding (rippled surfaces) is common on gravel roads, especially near stop sign-controlled intersections. This effect causes vehicles to bounce, reducing brake effectiveness. Vehicles without quality suspension systems (e.g., trailers) may lose contact with the roadway due to bouncing. Drivers should drive slowly, steer gently, and maintain good suspension.

4 Traction challenges:

Gravel roads provide less traction than asphalt or concrete surfaces, which can reduce stability and increase the risk of losing control. Additionally, steering responsiveness varies due to gravel size and distribution, making vehicles feel less predictable and harder to control. To mitigate these effects, drivers should reduce speed, maintain a safe following distance, steer gently, and ensure proper tire inflation.

5 Wet weather and spring thawing:

Weather events have a direct impact on the stability, erosion, and overall condition of gravel roads. During periods of heavy rain or spring thaw, water can wash away gravel, reducing traction and leading to the formation of ruts and soft spots. Additionally, freezing temperatures, if followed by cold weather, can create uneven road surfaces, posing additional hazards. Drivers should exercise caution and adjust their driving behavior accordingly.

For additional information related to driver safety, visit [MyNSightOnline.com/DriveThe5](https://www.nationwide.com/MyNSightOnline.com/DriveThe5)

For further guidance, refer to National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Unpaved Roads Safety Needs and Treatments (highways.dot.gov/safety/other/unpaved-roads-safety-needs-and-treatments).



For assistance with risk management services or safety resources, contact us at RMSolutions@nationwide.com or 1-800-260-1356.

NationwideAgribusiness.com

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Toolbox Talk

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Discussion notes:
