

## Stops signs not always the answer to stopping crashes at rural intersections



Uncontrolled Intersection in rural Crawford County. *Photo courtesy of Crawford County*

A number of serious traffic crashes have occurred recently at rural, uncontrolled intersections on lesser-traveled gravel roads in Iowa. On the surface, installing stop or yield signs at all rural intersections may seem to provide greater protection to the traveling public. However, a vast majority of drivers on lesser-traveled gravel roads are local drivers who travel these same roads at least once per week. They know which intersections have stop signs, yield signs, or no signs. Over regulating traffic can result in drivers ignoring critical signage where it is essential, leading to the possibility of more crashes. Installing many non-essential signs can lead to a less safe system overall, providing a false sense of security with drivers not stopping or recognizing the potential for conflict at the intersection.

In 2005, an Iowa State University study showed that there is “no statistical difference in the safety performance of ultra-low-volume, stop-controlled and uncontrolled intersections.” In non-engineering terms that means the study found installing stop signs on lesser-traveled roads didn’t improve safety.

In the United States, the regulation at an intersection is referred to as the “Right-of-Way Rule.” This rule states that an entering driver must yield to vehicles already in the intersection. If two vehicles are approaching an intersection at the same time, the driver on the left must yield to the driver on the right. At uncontrolled intersections, every driver has the responsibility to approach the intersection safely and follow the “Right-of-Way-Rule,” and drivers should incorporate this practice each time they approach any intersection.

As traffic patterns change due to urban expansion, business development, or other issues such as nearby road closures, traffic control needs will change. County or city engineers periodically review these types of situations to assure the safest solution for the traveling public.

If you encounter an uncontrolled, rural intersection remember:

- Tall corn in the late summer and early fall can make it hard to see other vehicles approaching the intersection. Drivers may need to stop at intersections they don't typically stop at;
- Other obstacles such as buildings, trees, and snow, especially this time of year, may also obstruct your view; and
- You can't always rely on dust at intersections to indicate traffic moving in the other direction. Recent rain, snow, or dust control material cuts down on dust, and dust is not visible during night time hours.

Most importantly, remember to yield, and be on the lookout for opposing traffic. If you can't see, don't go!