



FATALITY NARRATIVE

Orchard Laborer Caught in Tractor-Mounted Post Hole Digger *

Industry: Apple orchard

Task: Manually guiding post hole digger

Occupation: Orchard laborer

Type of Incident: Machinery / Tractor

Release Date: November 12, 2010

Incident Date: February 21, 2008

Case No.: 08WA00701

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On February 21, 2008, a 39-year-old orchard laborer died when he was caught in the power take-off (PTO) shaft of a tractor-mounted post hole digger. The victim worked at an apple orchard where he had been an employee for six years. The victim and a coworker were assigned to auger postholes to support young trees. They were using a tractor-mounted post hole digger to dig two to three foot deep holes. The tractor's PTO shaft rotated at 540 revolutions per minute. As his coworker operated the tractor and PTO shaft, the victim stood behind the tractor and to the side of the post hole digger manipulating the guide lever with his hands to make sure it was boring a straight hole. The right sleeve of the victim's jacket got caught in the unguarded, rotating PTO shaft of the post hole digger, causing his arm to become entangled and severed. He died at the scene. An investigation determined that the manufacturer requires a guard to be used and that individuals stay back 10 feet while the auger is being operated.



Incident scene showing post hole digger

Requirements

- ! Guard or shield tractor PTOs and their attachments. See [WAC 296-307-28006](#) and [WAC 296-307-30006](#).
- ! Train employees how to safely operate farm machinery. See [WAC 296-307-18015](#).
- ! Ensure that signs are placed at prominent locations on the tractor and on power takeoff driven equipment requiring that safety guards are kept in place. See [WAC 296-307-076](#).
- ! Ensure employees are aware of entanglement hazards while operating PTO driven equipment or machinery. See [WAC 296-307-18015](#).

Recommendations

- Always keep PTO guards and shields in place and in good condition.
- Follow the manufacturer's operating instructions for the safe operation of PTO driven devices.
- Make sure everyone is clear of the PTO and only start machine from the cab or operator's station.
- Disengage the PTO, shut off the tractor, and remove the keys before dismounting the equipment.
- Keep a safe distance of at least 10 feet from the PTO so there is no danger of falling into it or entanglement.
- Do not wear loose-fitting or frayed clothing and keep hair pulled back near PTO operated machinery.
- Do not reach over the back of the tractor to adjust the PTO or throttle.
- Never step over a revolving PTO shaft even if guarded. Retrofit older PTO devices with guards.

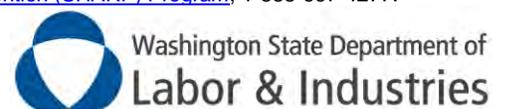
State Wide Statistics: This was number 6 out of 73 work-related fatalities in Washington State during 2008, and was number 1 out of 7 agriculture-related fatalities.

**This bulletin was developed to alert employers and employees of a tragic loss of life of a worker in Washington State and is based on preliminary data ONLY and does not represent final determinations regarding the nature of the incident or conclusions regarding the cause of the fatality.*

Developed by Washington State [Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation \(FACE\)](#) and the Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH), [WA State Dept. of Labor & Industries](#). The FACE Program is supported in part by a grant from the [National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health \(NIOSH\)](#). For more information, contact the [Safety and Health Assessment and Research for Prevention \(SHARP\) Program](#), 1-888-667-4277.



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