

Fatality Narrative

Brush Cutter Operator Struck by Section of Pipe*

Industry: Highway, street, and bridge construction

Occupation: Equipment operator

Task: Operating hydraulic brush cutter mounted on boom of track hoe

Type of Incident: Struck by

Release Date: April 27, 2005

Case No.: 04WA04701

SHARP Report No.: 71-34-2005

On June 18, 2004, a track hoe operator was fatally injured when he was struck in the head by a piece of debris (a section of pipe) kicked up by the brush cutter he was operating. The 51-year-old equipment operator was employed by a construction company that was doing site clearing for an airport runway. The victim was part of a crew that had been clearing brush from the work site. His job was to operate a rotating hydraulic brush cutter that was mounted to the boom of a track hoe. He was an experienced brush cutter operator and had worked with his present employer for 15 years. While in the process of running the brush cutter, the rotating cutting disc came in contact with a 19" by 3/4" piece of metal pipe that was lying on the ground. The disc kicked the pipe through the windshield of the operator's cab, striking him in the head.

Requirements/Recommendations

(! Indicates items required by law)

- ! Train equipment operators to recognize unsafe working conditions and practices.
- Before starting mechanical brush cutting work, inspect the area for objects that can be thrown by the rotating cutting disc. Remove or flag these objects.
- Guard brush cutter operator's cab with strong wire screen (or other safeguarding that is approved by the equipment manufacturer) designed to prevent thrown objects from entering the cab.
- Keep people away from the mowing and trimming area to protect bystanders from thrown objects.
- The rotary blades must be guarded with a shroud, kept at all times between the cutter and the operator.

State Wide Statistics: This was the 43rd out of 93 work-related fatalities in Washington State during the year 2004, and was the 8th out of 17 construction-related fatalities during the year.

This bulletin was developed at the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries to alert employers and employees in a timely manner of a tragic loss of life of a worker in Washington State. We encourage you to consider the above information as you make safety decisions for or recommendations to your company or constituency. The information in this notice 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 the Washington State Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) and Washington Industrial Safety and Health Act (WISHA) Programs at the WA State Dept. of Labor & Industries. The FACE Program is supported 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, <http://www.lni.wa.gov/Safety/Research/FACE>.