Fatality Narrative

Operator Killed When Construction Forklift Rolls Over*

Industry: Road construction
Occupation: Heavy equipment operator
Task: Operating heavy forklift to move pallets of bagged dry concrete
Type of Incident: Machinery/overturn/struck by

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On May 14, 2004, a heavy equipment operator was killed when the construction forklift he was operating overturned. The 51-year-old victim was employed by a general contractor and was working at a jobsite where a slope near a highway was being reinforced. The victim was driving a Caterpillar Telehandler along a dirt road that switch-backed across a hillside in order to move pallets of bagged dry concrete to another part of the worksite. During one of his trips the left side tires of the forklift ran up onto the uphill side of a dirt bank, causing the forklift to overturn. He was not wearing a seatbelt and he was ejected from the forklift. The forklift rolled over on the victim and then rolled several additional times before coming to rest 70 ft. below. The forklift was equipped with a roll-over protection system (ROPS) and falling object protection system (FOPS).

Requirements/Recommendations
(**!** Indicates items required by law)

! Operator restraints (seatbelts etc) must be used by equipment operators. Seat belts and/or lap bars are designed to help keep personnel safely positioned in the operators seat in the event of a tip-over or overturn.

! Forklift operators must be trained in the safe operation of the lift truck and workplace conditions.

! Forklift operators must understand the stability characteristics of the forklifts being driven. Forklift counter weights can shift the center of gravity especially when traveling on inclines and uneven and hilly terrain. Sudden acceleration, turning and braking can easily lead to tip-over or overturns.

- Forklift overturns can be prevented by inspecting and planning your path of travel. Look for steep inclines, drop-offs, holes and other uneven surface hazards that can affect the stability of the forklift.

! If the forklift's path of travel takes it near an incline, a drop-off, or an embankment, make sure to maintain a safe distance from the hazard. Operate the forklift at a safe speed and allow plenty of room to stop and maneuver away from these potential driving hazards as necessary.

- Never attempt to jump off a tipping forklift. Grab hold of the wheel tightly, brace your feet and lean away from the direction of the tip-over or overturn, making sure arms and legs remain within the operating area of the forklift.

State Wide Statistics: This was the 35th out of 92 work-related fatalities in Washington State during the year 2004, and was the 7th 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.

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