

# FATALITY NARRATIVE

## Orchard Tractor Operator Run Over by Mower Attachment

**Industry:** Orchard  
**Task:** Operating tractor pulling mower  
**Occupation:** Orchard laborer/tractor operator  
**Type of Incident:** Tractor-related/run over

**Incident Date:** April 29, 2013  
**Release Date:** April 3, 2014  
**SHARP Report No.:** 71-130-2014  
**Case No.:** 13WA01501



On April 29, 2013, a 25-year-old orchard laborer operating a tractor died when he fell from the tractor and was run over by a mower attachment. The victim was operating a narrow-width, low-profile tractor with an attached mower mowing grass between rows of pear trees. There were no witnesses, but based on evidence at the scene, investigators determined the probable sequence of events. As the victim was mowing, his head struck against a branch, causing his hat to fall to the ground. With the intention of retrieving his hat, he stopped the tractor. He placed the power take off (PTO) in neutral,

which cut power to the mower blades. As he was preparing to get off the tractor, he failed to put the transmission lever in neutral. When he lifted his left foot off the clutch, the tractor lurched forward, causing him to fall off the tractor and onto the ground. The tractor, which was running and in gear, continued to move forward and the victim was run over by the 1740 lb. mower.

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### Requirements

Employers must:

- Instruct all employees in safe work practices at the beginning of employment. Instruction must be tailored to types of hazards to which employees are exposed. See WAC 307-030(1).
- Create a tractor training program which is described in a written accident prevention program. See WAC 296-307-030.
- Ensure that every employee who operates an agricultural tractor is informed that when the tractor is stopped they should set brakes securely and use park lock if available. See WAC 296-307-08018(1)(9).

### Recommendations

- Always shut down the tractor's engine and follow the manufacturer's recommended parking procedures before leaving the seat.
- Employers and tractor owners should consider purchasing or retrofitting tractors with an operator presence sensing system (OPSS). The OPSS shuts off the power to the tractor when the operator leaves the seat. This prevents inadvertent movement of the tractor should the operator attempt to dismount from the tractor without following proper parking procedures.
- Manufacturers of tractors should continue to develop, refine, and install OPSS.

**Statewide Statistics:** This was number 17 of 52 work-related fatalities in Washington State during 2013, and was number 2 of 6 agriculture-related fatalities.

This narrative 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 WA State Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) Program 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 grant# 5 U60 OH008487-09). For more information, contact the Safety and Health Assessment and Research for Prevention (SHARP) Program. 1-888-667-4277.