

FATALITY NARRATIVE

Tractor Operator Crushed by Trailer

Industry: Hop farm
Task: Operating tractor towing trailer
Occupation: Farm laborer
Type of Incident: Tractor-related/crushed

Incident Date: August 31, 2014
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Case No.: 14WA005501

On August 31, 2014, a 22-year-old hop farm laborer was crushed when a trailer landed on top of him. He was operating a tractor pulling a trailer when the trailer detached and came forward and landed on top of the tractor and crushed him. This was the victim's first season working at his employer's hop farm. He had been employed there for six months. His job duties included hauling bales of hops from the field by operating a tractor with a trailer. On the day of the incident, he was operating a utility tractor to tow a 25-foot empty flatbed trailer from the farm's shop to the equipment storage area. As he was moving through the level dirt yard, the trailer separated from the tractor and bounced up and overtook the tractor. The front of the trailer landed on the tractor. The victim was crushed between the trailer's frame and the tractor's steering wheel. Investigators determined that the trailer was incorrectly attached to the tractor. Instead of using a hitch pin to connect the trailer's tongue to the tractor's hitch, a bolt was used. There was no physical evidence found at the scene to indicate that the bolt was secured



Incident scene at employer storage yard where a farm laborer died when a trailer he was pulling detached from the tractor and landed on top of the tractor.

at its bottom to prevent it coming loose. The tractor was found in its highest gear with the hand throttle in the lowest position (indicating that the victim was using the foot throttle to control the tractor's speed). These two facts suggest that the tractor may have been travelling at a high rate of speed. Additionally, there was no rollover protective structure (ROPS) on the tractor. A ROPS might have provided protection to the operator when the trailer landed on the tractor.

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Requirements

Employers must:

- Maintain in a safe condition towing connections between tractors and all equipment and remove from service if in need of repair. See WAC 296-307-07001.
- Train employees how to safely operate tractors that they will be required to use. See WAC 296-307-08018.
- Furnish and require employees to use any safety devices and safeguards that are needed to control recognized hazards. See WAC 296-307-045.
- Provide a rollover protective structure (ROPS) for each employee operated tractor. See WAC 296-307-08009.

Recommendations

- Develop and enforce a policy requiring tractor operators to ensure that trailers are properly connected to tractors so that they will not detach.
- Consult and follow the towing guidance provided by the manufacturer's operator's manual for all tractors, trailers, implements, and equipment. Proper hitching will prevent accidental release of towed equipment.
- Operate tractors at a safe speed when towing a trailer. Excessive speed may cause a trailer to bounce and cause the trailer connection to fail.
- Attach trailer hitch pins to tractors so that they are always available to be used when towing any attachment.

Statewide Statistics: This was number 53 of 70 work-related fatalities in Washington State during 2014, and was number 7 of 9 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.