

Tractor Operator Crushed by Trailer

Industry: Hop farm

Task: Operating tractor towing trailer

Occupation: Farm laborer

Type of Incident: Tractor-related/crushed





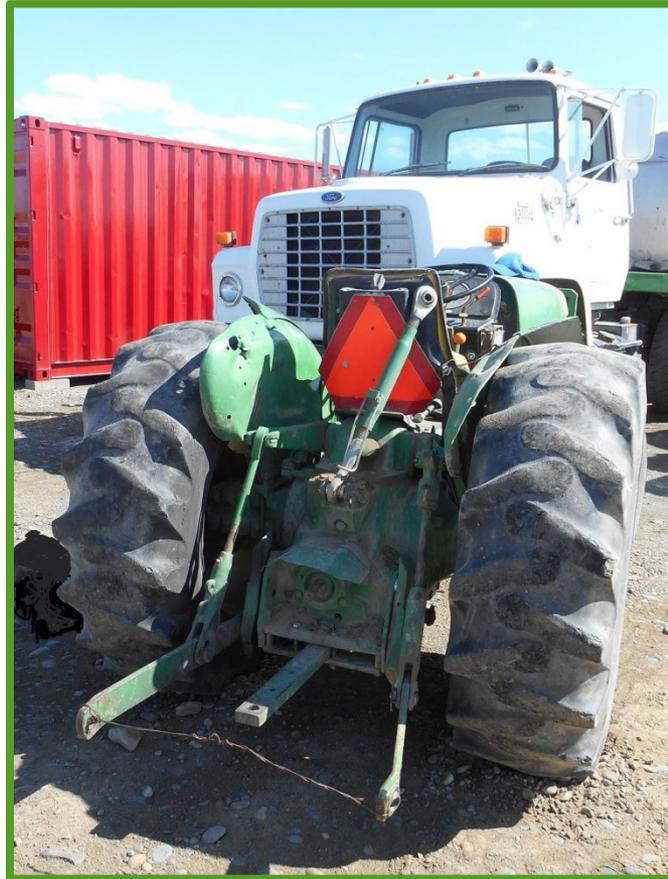
FATALITY NARRATIVE

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 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.

FATALITY NARRATIVE



Incident scene showing the rear of the tractor that the victim was operating at his employer's equipment storage yard when a trailer he was towing detached from the tractor and landed on top of the tractor and crushed him.



Twenty-five foot flatbed trailer that detached from the tractor and landed on top of the tractor, crushing the operator.

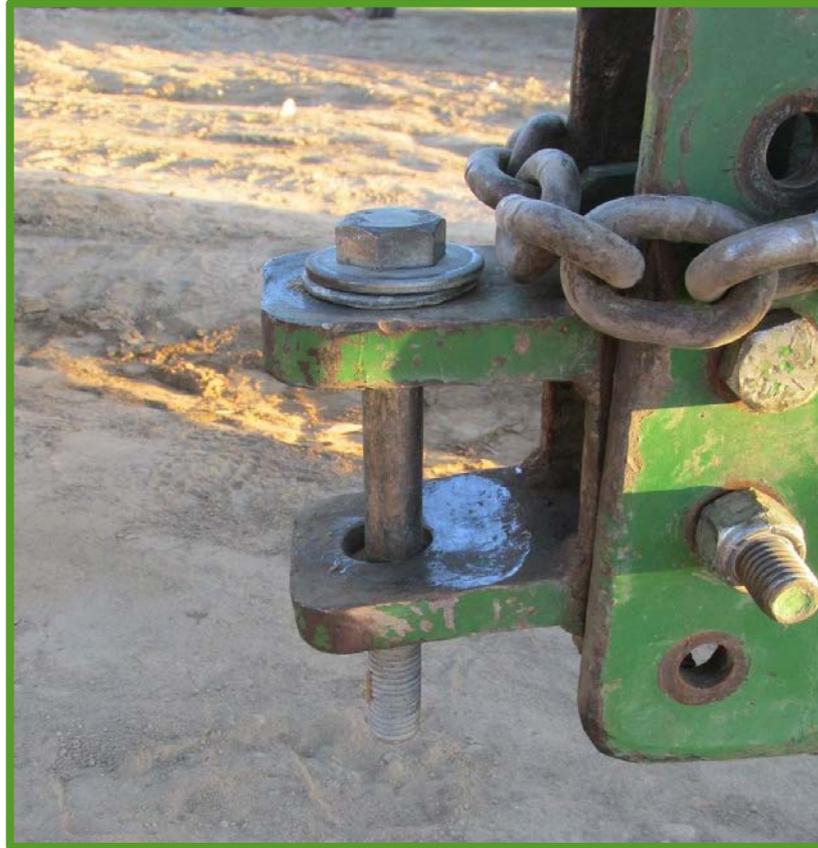


FATALITY NARRATIVE

Requirements

- 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](#).

FATALITY NARRATIVE



Bolt used as connecting pin to tractor. There was no evidence that the bolt was secured at the bottom to prevent it from coming loose.



FATALITY NARRATIVE

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.



FATALITY NARRATIVE

Recommendations

- 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.



FATALITY NARRATIVE

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 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.

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