

FATALITY NARRATIVE

Tractor Operator Dies When Tractor Rolls Over On Road

Industry: Apple orchard
Task: Operating tractor on roadway
Occupation: Orchard laborer
Type of Incident: Tractor rollover

Incident Date: April 11, 2015
Release Date: October 19, 2015
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Case No.: 15WA01401



Incident scene showing the overturned tractor with an attached sprayer where it came to rest on a county road.

On April 11, 2015, a 57-year-old orchard laborer was fatally injured when the tractor he was operating rolled over. The victim was an experienced tractor operator and was a seasonal worker at his employer's apple orchard. He had spent the morning and early afternoon operating a tractor towing a sprayer to spray several blocks in an apple orchard. The orchard in which he had been working met the Washington State exemption for using a tractor's rollover protective structure (ROPS) or roll bar in the down or lowered position; this is allowed in orchards when tractor height clearances would interfere with normal operations. The tractor he was operating had been manufactured to have a foldable ROPS, but it did not have one installed, nor did it have a seat belt. In order to get to another orchard block, he had to travel a mile and a half on a

paved county road. He was traveling downhill along this road towing an empty sprayer when he drove the tractor to the right onto the road's soft, gravel shoulder. He apparently attempted to bring the tractor back onto the road, but overcorrected, causing the tractor to veer into the opposite lane and overturn. He was crushed under the tractor and declared dead at the scene. An investigation determined that speed may have been a factor. The tractor was in high gear and may have been going between 11 and 15 mph. The incident investigator confirmed that a local tractor dealership had ROPS available for the tractor model involved in the incident. If this tractor had been fitted with ROPS and the operator had been wearing a seat belt, he would have been protected from being crushed under the tractor.

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Requirements

- Employers must provide a rollover structure (ROPS) for each employee-operated tractor that is covered by [WAC 296-307-080](#). See [WAC 296-307-08009](#).
- Where ROPS are required by WAC 296-307-080 employers must:
 - a) Provide each tractor with a seat belt.
 - b) Require that each employee use the seat belt while the tractor is moving.
 - c) Require that each employee tighten the seat belt sufficiently to confine the employee to the ROPS protected area.
 See [WAC 296-307-08012](#).

Recommendations

ROPS and seat belts on tractors save lives!

- If your tractor does not have a ROPS, contact your local tractor dealer to have the tractor fitted with ROPS.
- Train tractor operators to use ROPS and a seat belt. The ROPS should be folded down only when necessary, otherwise it should be in the "up" position.
- Use the braking power of the tractor's engine by shifting to a lower gear when going downhill. Operating the tractor in a high gear can make it difficult to control.
- Traveling too fast while pulling a sprayer, trailer, or an implement can make it hard to maintain control of the tractor and could result in it jack-knifing or rolling over.

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.

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