

Truck Driver Crushed When Unsecured Equipment Falls From Trailer

Industry: Potato harvesting and transport

Task: Loading equipment onto trailer

Occupation: Truck driver

Type of Incident: Struck by falling object





FATALITY NARRATIVE

In September 2016, a 45-year-old truck driver died when he was struck by two potato conveyor belt tables that fell from a flatbed trailer. He had worked for the multi-state potato harvesting and transport company for about four months.

On the morning of the incident, the victim arrived at around 7 a.m. and began loading four tables onto a lowboy flatbed trailer so they could be transported to another site. Each table was 41 feet long and weighed approximately 3000 lbs. The surface of the lowboy trailer was 38 in. from the ground and was arched slightly at the center. The semi-truck was parked in a location with a slight grade, and there was a 3-degree slope from the front of the trailer to the rear.

It is not clear why the victim attempted to load the tables onto the trailer by himself. Company procedure was to call at least one other worker for help when loading this kind of equipment. He had done the same task the day before with the help of other workers



FATALITY NARRATIVE

This morning, however, the victim worked alone with a forklift to place a stack of two tables on the driver's side of the trailer. Next, he loaded the second stacked pair on the other side, offset toward the rear of the trailer. The position of the table wheels on the flatbed were straight in-line with the trailer surface. He did not chain or chock the wheels of the tables to keep them from moving.

After loading the tables, the victim parked the forklift and went back to the trailer and began laying out equipment to tie down the load. Company procedure would have been to leave the forklift in place to support the stacked tables while the wheels were secured with chains.



FATALITY NARRATIVE

Around this time, a truck driver from another company drove onto the site. He saw the victim get out of his cab and walk around behind the loaded trailer. As the truck driver went past the victim's trailer, he noticed that a stack of two tables had fallen onto the ground.

When he walked over to see what had happened, he saw that the tables had fallen onto the victim's back. He and another worker used a forklift and a front-end loader to lift the tables off the victim, and then called 911. The victim was pronounced dead at the scene.



Stacked conveyor belt tables that fell from the trailer and struck the victim as he was laying out tie-down equipment. A witness used the forklift to raise the tables off the victim.



Rear view of stacked conveyor belt tables that fell from the trailer and struck the victim. (The tables remaining on the trailer were tied down post-incident for safety.)



FATALITY NARRATIVE

Requirements

Employers must ensure that employees load and unload motor vehicles safely.

See [WAC 296-307-01009\(1\)](#)



FATALITY NARRATIVE

Recommendations

- Develop written procedures for safely loading and securing wheeled or mobile cargo, including chocking, chaining, or otherwise stabilizing loads before tie-down.
- Train drivers to follow safe cargo loading and securement procedures, and ensure that they understand and follow procedures on every load. Document training and make sure procedures are followed through spot-checks.
- Train drivers to recognize potential safety hazards before loading and securement, such as uneven terrain or cargo that could shift or roll, and to develop plans to keep cargo stable during the loading process.



FATALITY NARRATIVE

Recommendations

- Avoid working or standing in an area where cargo could fall if it shifts during loading.
- Maintain visual contact with cargo at all times during loading until it is secure. Do not turn your back on the load.
- **Ask for help if you need it. Do not take shortcuts when it comes to safety!**



FATALITY NARRATIVE

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.

Developed by Washington State Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) Program and the Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH), Washington 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# 2 U60OH008487). For more information, contact the Safety and Health Assessment and Research for Prevention (SHARP) Program, 1-888-667-4277.