

FATALITY NARRATIVE

Truck Driver Hauling Grain Dies When Truck Crashes

Industry: Wheat Farming
Task: Hauling load of grain
Occupation: Truck driver
Type of Incident: Motor vehicle

Incident Date: August 8, 2016
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In August of 2016, the 55-year-old driver of a grain truck died when his truck's brakes were unable to slow the truck and it left the road and crashed into a building. The victim was employed to help during the harvest of wheat on a family member's farm. He was being paid for his work. He had over 25 years experience driving commercial vehicles. The truck, manufactured in 1988, was purchased by the employer the previous year. For the past three weeks, he had been working 10 to 11 hours per day, 6 days per week. The victim primarily made his living as a pastor in the local community. He also drove a school bus and worked as an on-call fireman. During previous harvests, he had worked for other farmers in the area and had driven many types of trucks. He had a valid CDL. On the day of the incident, his last before he went on vacation, he was driving a tandem-axle grain truck pulling a pup trailer, both fully loaded with wheat. This vehicle was used only during the harvest. According to the employer, before being put into service for the harvest, the truck had been checked and everything was adjusted properly. He was on the way to a nearby town to make a delivery to a grain elevator. He had made many trips with full loads to this elevator, including one earlier in the day. As he was driving along a state highway carrying approximately 60,000 lbs of wheat, he started down a long hill



Incident scene showing the grain truck.

on the outskirts of town. The brakes were insufficient to slow the truck's descent. Attempting to slow down the truck, he used the Jake brake, downshifted, and applied what little brakes he had. As the truck entered the town a witness estimated that it was travelling at about 50 mph. The truck left the road, entered a dirt covered lot and then crashed into the grain elevator's scale house where he was to make his delivery. The victim died at the scene. Investigators determined that the brakes had been in disrepair for some time and that out of twelve brakes, only four were working properly. According to State Patrol, as the victim downshifted while descending the hill he likely missed a gear and was unable to get the transmission back into gear; this caused the truck to gather speed. The four remaining functional brakes were not sufficient to stop the truck.

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Requirements

- Ensure that motor vehicles have brakes that will safely hold the maximum load on maximum grades. See [WAC 296-307-07007\(1\)](#)
- Maintain all motor vehicles and their parts in good repair and safe condition. See [WAC 296-307-07001\(1\)](#)
- Employees must report to their employer any motor vehicle or other farm equipment that is in unsafe operating condition. That vehicle or equipment must then be removed from service and repaired before use. See [WAC 296-307-07001\(3\)](#)

Recommendations

- Regularly check to ensure that all braking systems on trucks and trailers are operational. Do this on a scheduled basis, as part of the pre-trip vehicle walk-around safety inspection, and whenever the brakes don't feel "right."
- Don't wait until vehicle braking becomes critical. Remember, nothing is more important than your safety and that of family members and employees.

Resources

Commercial Driver Guide. Washington State Dept. of Licensing. www.dol.wa.gov/driverslicense/docs/cdlguide.pdf

Insuring that farm vehicles are road ready. Video produced by Successful Farming Magazine. www.agriculture.com/video/machinery-spotlight-transportation

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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