

Lowboy Operator's Fingers Amputated

Task: Coupling lowboy to trailer deck **Occupation:** Lowboy operator **Release Date:** 2019

In May 2019, a lowboy operator had two fingers partially amputated after they were crushed between the trailer gooseneck and the processor counterbalance. The operator was coupling the lowboy gooseneck to a lowbed trailer deck after loading and chaining down a processor. After backing in the lowboy, he climbed under the machine counterbalance to place shims. The operator can only place shims by climbing in between the gooseneck and the trailer after the initial hookup is completed. The shims are stored on a keeper post on the rear of the gooseneck. He reached under the machine counterbalance to replace the cotter pin in the keeper post. As he was doing this, he steadied himself with his left hand on the support frame of the gooseneck. At this point, the trailer detached from the gooseneck and fell to the ground. The operator's left middle finger and ring finger were crushed between the processor counterbalance and trailer gooseneck, partially amputating them. Investigators determined that while the operator had prior experience, it had been over ten years since he had last worked with a lowboy. The employer assumed that because the operator had past experience he did not need training. Also, during coupling, the hooks of the trailer did not fully couple over the steel pins of the gooseneck. It can be difficult to determine when this happens, as there is no good way to visually inspect the connections of the components.



Incident scene showing the position of the operator (X) when the trailer detached from the gooseneck.

Safety Requirements

- Employers must adequately train employees to recognize safety and health hazards associated with the employee's specific tasks, including using measures and work practices to prevent and control those hazards. See [WAC 296-54-515\(3\)\(h\)](#).

Recommended Safe Practices

- Create a reference point on the trailer deck, by either painting or welding, to show when the trailer is all the way backed into the pins, ensuring proper coupling.
- Wait to position and chain down a load on the trailer until after coupling is complete. In this case, for coupling, the processor should have been positioned to the rear of the trailer deck rather than towards the front. After coupling was complete, the processor should have been repositioned forward and chained down. This sequence minimizes the overhead hazard for the lowboy operator.
- Site managers should verify that employees can safely operate new equipment and complete assigned tasks.

