

Truck Driver Has Fatal Fall While Tarping Flatbed Trailer

INCIDENT FACTS

REPORT #: 71-220-2022s

REPORT DATE: May 2, 2022

INCIDENT DATE: July 17, 2017

WORKER: 57 years old

INDUSTRY: General freight trucking

OCCUPATION: Semi-truck driver

SCENE: Outdoor gravel truck yard

EVENT TYPE: Fall from elevation



A 57-year-old long-haul semi-truck driver died after he fell to the ground while tarping a flatbed trailer.

He had been employed by the flatbed cargo hauling business for 13 years. It was his first day back at work after having spent a month recovering from back sprain injuries caused by a previous traffic collision. The weather was sunny and dry.

He had picked up a load of sheet aluminum wrapped in plastic from a nearby rolling mill and returned to his employer's yard to tarp it. A mechanic placed a tarp on the rear of the trailer deck with a forklift and drove away. A co-worker leaving the yard waved to the driver who was standing by his truck.

No one else saw the driver until an hour later when a worker driving into the yard noticed the driver laying unresponsive and bleeding on the ground below the driver's side cab steps. First responders arrived soon after being called but could not save the driver. The coroner determined that the driver died of traumatic head injuries caused by a fall.

As the incident had no witnesses, investigators presumed from physical evidence that the driver had climbed on top of the trailer, placed tarps at the front and rear ends, and at some point afterward fell around 51 inches to the ground on the passenger's side. Evidence at the scene suggested that the driver got up after falling, walked around the front of the tractor, climbed into the cab, and, while exiting the cab, fell again to the ground where he was found.

Investigators found:

- 1) The employer's Accident Prevention Plan (APP) or safety program was not tailored to prevent hazards of flatbed tarping.
- 2) It also lacked a policy that could have required drivers to use specific procedures to safely access, exit, and tarp flatbed trailers.
- 3) The driver was wearing loosely tied sneakers and working in poor health with coronary and kidney diseases.
- 4) The employer did not follow state requirements to report workplace fatalities within eight hours and to leave equipment unmoved at the incident scene.



Photo 1. Front view of semi-truck with flatbed trailer at incident scene. After falling from the trailer on the passenger side, the injured driver got up, walked around the front of the tractor, climbed into the cab, and, while exiting the cab, fell again to the ground where he was found. Red arrows show locations of tarps placed on load. Yellow X shows where driver was found.

FATALITY NARRATIVE



Photo 2. View of flatbed trailer's passenger side where the driver fell while tarping load of sheet aluminum. The driver fell around 51 inches from the deck to the ground below.

FATALITY NARRATIVE



Photo 3. Another view of flatbed trailer’s passenger side where the driver fell while tarping load of sheet aluminum. Incident trailer on right. View also shows a fully tarped trailer on left.

Requirements

Employers must:

- Develop APP safety policies, hazard solutions, personal protective equipment (PPE) requirements, and training to prevent falls from trailers.

See: [WAC 296-800-14005](#)

- Report worker fatalities to the Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH) within 8 hours and do not move incident equipment.

See: [WAC 296-87-031](#) and [WAC 296-800-32010](#)

Recommendations

- Use fall protection, a tarping station or elevating work platform, if possible.
- Create a Job Hazard Analysis (JHA) specific for each type of trailer tarping operation. Routinely update each JHA. Include workers in JHA development.
- Regularly evaluate drivers to make sure they are following flatbed tarping safety procedures.

Resources

- Use the [TIRES Safety Program Development Tool](#) to design a written APP or company safety program that includes policies, job hazard solutions, and training to prevent falls from trailers.
- Use the [Falls from Elevations While Tarping](#) injury prevention tip sheet for trucking businesses from the Immediate Inpatient Hospitalizations project.

This narrative was developed to alert employers and workers of a tragic incident 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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