

Temp Worker Crushed By Rollaway Forklift at Family Farm

INCIDENT FACTS

REPORT #: 71-263-2025s

REPORT DATE: February 17, 2025

INCIDENT DATE: September 26, 2023

WORKER: 43 years old

INDUSTRY: Farm Labor Contractors and
Crew Leaders

OCCUPATION: Pallet Wrapper

SCENE: Packing shed

EVENT TYPE: Caught in or between /
Crushed by Forklift



A 43-year-old seasonal farm worker was crushed by a forklift at an onion packing shed. He was working for a temp labor contractor who sent him to work as a pallet wrapper at a family-owned onion farm. He was two months into his third harvest season at the farm.

He was working on a night crew along with a supervisor, a sorter, and two stackers, who all worked for the same labor contractor. His job was to shrink wrap sacks of onions stacked on pallets inside the packing shed. The supervisor was the designated forklift operator who moved the pallets. The crew was one stacker short so the supervisor went to help stack and told the worker to drive the forklift to pick up bins of onions stacked outside for processing.

When he did not return for almost an hour, the supervisor went to look for him. He found the worker crushed between bins loaded on the forklift and bins stacked on the ground. He was unconscious and not breathing. The supervisor backed the forklift off the worker and saw it was in neutral with the parking brake not set. He then returned to the shed and alerted a coworker who called 911. First responders pronounced the worker dead at the scene.

Following the incident, investigators found:

- The worker had been operating the forklift his entire time at the farm without training. The contractor only gave him an overview of forklift safety in an orientation before he began his job.
- The worker picked and lowered two bins, reversed, stopped, and left the forklift on a one-percent grade without setting the parking brake. The forklift then rolled forward into him as he stepped between the bins to adjust a tarp. The area was dark and the only light was from his forklift.

- The contractor and host employer became aware the worker was using the forklift without training after his first week at the farm. They did not effectively communicate with each other and with the crew supervisor and contractor's safety manager to prevent the worker from using the forklift.



Photo 1. Forklift with onion bins retrieved by worker.

FATALITY NARRATIVE



Photo 2. Bins where worker was crushed.



Photo 3. Pitch and slope indicator showing one-percent grade at incident site.

Requirements

Employers must:

- Make sure powered industrial truck (PIT) operators are trained. See [WAC 296-863 60005](#)
- Neutralize the controls and set the brakes when getting off the PIT. See [WAC 296-863-40020](#)

Recommendations

FACE investigators concluded that to help prevent similar occurrences, employers should:

- Use PITs equipped with automatic parking brake systems that can prevent rollaways by engaging when the driver releases the service brake and leaves the vehicle while it is still idling.

Recommendations

- Develop and enforce PIT policies in their written accident prevention program (APP) that:
 - o Allow only workers who are trained to operate PITs and require supervisors to immediately stop workers who are not trained from using them.
 - o Perform a job hazard analysis (JHA) jointly with supervisors and PIT operators to identify rollaway and crush hazards, such as operating areas with any inclines.
- Establish clear safety communication with host employers to ensure temporary workers get an effective safety orientation, supervision, and training on the job hazards they will be exposed to.

Resources

[Complete Forklifts training kit](#)

Washington State Dept. of Labor & Industries

Completion of this course, along with workplace-specific hands-on training, fulfills the training requirements of Forklifts, [WAC 296-863-600](#).

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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