

INCIDENT FACTS

REPORT #:

71-270-2025

REPORT DATE:

September 8, 2025

INCIDENT DATE:

July 12, 2024

VICTIM:

67 years old

INDUSTRY:

Other Vegetable (except Potato) and Melon Farming

OCCUPATION:

Farm Worker

SCENE:

River levee embankment

EVENT TYPE:

Crush - Caught in or between / Machine



Mower being recovered.

[For a slideshow version, click here.](#)



This narrative was developed to alert employers and workers of a tragic incident and is based on preliminary data ONLY and does not represent final determinations regarding the nature of the incident or the cause of the injury. Developed by WA State Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (WA FACE) Program and the Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH), WA State Dept. of Labor & Industries. WA FACE is supported in part by a grant from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH grant# 5U60OH008487). For more information visit www.lni.wa.gov/safety-health/safety-research/ongoing-projects/work-related-fatalities-face.

Farm Worker Crushed in Riding Lawn Mower Rollover

SUMMARY

A 67-year-old farm worker was crushed when his zero-turn riding lawn mower rolled down an embankment. He worked part-time for his employer, a family-run specialty vegetable farm, for four years. He was an experienced land caretaker and mowed the grass each week.

He was operating the mower on top of a grassy, steep embankment between a river and a road. He began working late in the morning and drove the mower to the cutting site about a half mile from the farm's main office. Later in the day the employer noticed that the worker's car was still parked at the office. He called the worker and his foreman but got no answer. He then called his son and drove to the site to check on the worker.

He found the worker unresponsive, several feet down the embankment's inner riverside slope with the overturned mower on top of him. He called 911. First responders had the employer remove the mower to free his body, but he died at the scene. No one saw the incident.

Following the incident, investigators found:

- The worker was not operating the mower according to the manufacturer's instructions in the following instances: 1) the rollover protective structure (ROPS) was not in the upright position, 2) no seat belt was used, and 3) mowing was taking place where the risk of a rollover was high.
- The riding surface on top of the embankment was 12 feet wide but uneven with steep slopes on both sides, including a three foot drop off on the inner slope, that exposed the worker to rollover hazards.
- There were no overhead obstructions that interfered with using ROPS in the upright position.

REQUIREMENTS

Employers must:

- Make sure employees use all power lawn mowers according to the manufacturer's instructions. See [WAC 296-307-22006\(6\)](#)

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

- Require the use of a walk-behind mower or string trimmer instead of a riding mower in hazardous areas such as embankments, steep slopes, soft ground, bodies of water, edges along bodies of water, and terrain with holes, ruts, bumps or other hidden objects.
- Develop and enforce policy requirements for ROPS and seat belt use and mower operator safety training in their written [accident prevention program](#) (APP). At a minimum, the policy should conform to the manufacturer's safety requirements. Review requirements with supervisors and operators at safety meetings and training.
- Perform and document a [Job Hazard Analysis](#) (JHA) for riding mowers that identifies and assesses all associated operating hazards. Use the JHA to develop injury prevention controls or hazard solutions.
- Make sure that riding mower operators follow the machine manufacturer's instructions to always use ROPS in the upright position and to wear the provided seat belt.
- Maintain a buffer area at least as wide as the mower between hazards and the mowing area. Do not mow or operate the mower in the hazard area or buffer area.

RESOURCES

[Dangers of Roll Overs of Riding Mowers](#) – Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)



Mower with ROPS down.