



FATALITY NARRATIVE

Orchard Tractor Operator Dies When Tractor Rolls Over *

Industry: Orchard

Task: Operating tractor with spreader to apply mouse bait

Occupation: Orchard worker/tractor operator

Type of Incident: Tractor rollover

Release Date: April 2, 2012

Incident Date: November 10, 2010

Case No.: 10WA07201

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On November 10, 2010, an orchard worker died when the low-profile tractor he was operating rolled. The 66-year-old victim had worked as a tractor operator at the orchard for four years. The orchard, a mixture of apple and cherry trees, was on a hillside. The victim was operating a low-profile tractor with an attachment spreading mouse bait. He started work at 10:30 a.m. and last spoke with his foreman about 2 p.m. The foreman told him to finish spreading the bait in the area he was working, then continue in a block of cherry trees until his 3:30 p.m. quitting time. The cherry trees were 10 feet from each other. The rows were 15 feet apart on a slope varying from 8 to 16 degrees. When the victim did not return home his wife contacted the foreman, who sent workers to look for him. At 10:15 p.m., the victim was found deceased beneath the overturned tractor. An investigation determined the tractor had no seatbelt, but did have a manufacturer-installed two-point foldable rollover protective structure (ROPS) that was not deployed and was in the "down" position. The area of the orchard where the victim was working did not have overhead clearance issues and therefore the ROPS should have been used. At the time of the rollover, the tractor was traveling downhill and was equipped with front tires that were light truck tires, not the original tractor tires.



Requirements

- Ensure that tractors have rollover protective structures (ROPS) and seatbelts. See WAC 296-307-08009 and WAC 296-307-08012. For ROPS requirement exceptions on agricultural tractors, see WAC 296-307-08015.
- Train tractor operators:
 - To safely operate tractors to avoid rollovers.
 - To safely operate the specific tractors to be used.
 - To safely maneuver or avoid land hazards like ditches, holes, or slopes that may result in a rollover.
 - To use seatbelts if a tractor has a ROPS. If it has foldable or detachable ROPS, the ROPS should be in place and in the upright position. See WAC 296-307-08018 and WAC 296-307-08021.

Recommendations

- Use a tractor equipped with ROPS and a seatbelt whenever possible. You may save a life!
- Reduce tractor speed when turning, operating on steep slopes, or navigating slick, rough, or muddy terrain.
- Inspect terrain before working and be aware of surroundings to avoid trees, holes, ditches and other obstacles.
- Replace tractor parts with those that meet manufacturer recommended guidelines for safe operation.

State Wide Statistics: This was number 82 out of 89 work-related fatalities in Washington State during 2010, and was number 7 out of 7 agriculture-related fatalities.

**This bulletin 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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