

WHAT HAPPENED?

Equipment operator dies from rotating disc on excavator

An equipment operator trimming brush alongside a logging road died after he was apparently pulled into a rotating disc used to cut brush.

The victim was an experienced equipment operator using a Cat excavator with a cutting attachment on the boom. He was working alone.

At some point, the victim left the operator's seat of the excavator and approached the rotating cutting disc attached to the end of the boom. He had left the cutting head 'hot,' meaning all the hydraulics were activated to the head, and the engine of the excavator was idling. The 400-lb cutting blade had power to it and was rotating just above idle.

It appears the victim may have grabbed a tree branch stuck in the cutting head and was likely pulled into the rotating disc, suffering injuries that were immediately fatal.

Because the victim was working alone, he was not found until three hours after the end of his shift.



RELATED ONLINE RESOURCES

Go to <https://lni.wa.gov/safety-health/preventing-injuries-illnesses/get-started-with-safety-health/machine-safety>



WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PREVENT A FATALITY FROM HAPPENING AT YOUR WORKPLACE?

Take these steps to help ensure a safe working environment

- Make sure workers are trained on and use lockout/tagout procedures for machinery they will be using.
- Conduct a job hazard analysis (JHA) to identify any hazards they face while the machine is in operation.
- Have workers inspect and maintain equipment before using it.
- Train workers who operate equipment similar to that used in this incident on the hazards posed by getting too close to any rotating disc.
- Make sure workers know the procedures for safely exiting the operator's seat of any heavy equipment.
- When operating machinery powered by a hydraulic system, make sure all the hydraulics are disabled before getting out of the cab, particularly if the engine is left running.
- For employees who work alone, develop a check-in/check-out procedure. A formal plan for checking on employees working alone can be critical for adequate emergency response time.

Need more information?

Go to <https://lni.wa.gov/safety-health/preventing-injuries-illnesses/get-started-with-safety-health/> for information on workplace safety and health, rules and policies, sample programs and general assistance.

Call 1-800-423-7233 to contact the Department of Labor & Industries (L&I), Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH).

Interested in a free safety and health consultation at your workplace?

The Department of Labor & Industries provides consultations, training, and technical assistance at no cost to employers. Call today to schedule a free confidential consultation or go to <https://lni.wa.gov/safety-health/preventing-injuries-illnesses/request-consultation/consultant-near-you> for more information. You may also call 1-800-423-7233 or visit a local L&I office and ask for the Consultation Manager.

How does an employee file a complaint?

Employees or employee representatives may file formal complaints with DOSH when they believe a safety or health hazard exists in their workplace.

Complaint forms are available from a local L&I office in both English and Spanish, or on the Web at <https://lni.wa.gov/workers-rights/workplace-complaints/safety-complaints>.

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This bulletin was developed by L&I's Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH) to alert employers, labor groups, and employees of a tragic loss of life. The information in this bulletin is based on preliminary data and does NOT represent final determinations of the incident or conclusions regarding the cause of the fatality.

