

Orchard Tractor Operator Dies When Run Over by Rotary Mower After Falling From Tractor



SUMMARY

In April of 2013, an orchard worker died when he was run over by a rotary mower after he fell from the tractor it was attached to. The victim was using the tractor and mower attachment to cut the grass between rows of pear trees. The incident was not witnessed, but investigators believe that it is most probable that he fell when he attempted to dismount the tractor to retrieve his hat that may have been knocked off by a low hanging branch. He likely either failed to put the tractor in neutral when he stopped, causing the tractor to lurch forward when he removed his foot from the clutch pedal, or inadvertently moved the gear selector lever out of neutral as he stood up to dismount the tractor. In either scenario, it is assumed that the sudden or unexpected movement of the tractor caused



Tractor and mower attachment involved in incident

him to fall to the ground between the tractor and the mower. As the tractor continued to move forward, the victim's upper body was run over by the 1740 lb. mower. He was pronounced dead at the scene.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To prevent similar incidents, Washington State Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (WA FACE) recommends that employers engaged in similar work:

- Train operators to always shut down tractors safely before leaving the driver's seat. Ensure that they follow safety guidelines through frequent retraining and spot checks.
- Train operators to always mount and dismount tractors in a safe manner by using all steps and handholds available, and maintaining three points of contact.
- Keep clear of obstacles, such as low hanging branches, to the extent possible when operating a tractor with or without attachments.
- Consider using tractors equipped with operator presence sensing (OPS) technology or other interlocks that will lock out the powertrain and PTO if the operator leaves the driver's seat.

SHARP Publication # 52-40-2017_summary The full version of this investigation report, along with the detailed recommendations and discussions section, can be found at: www.lni.wa.gov/Safety/Research/FACE/Files/OrchardTractorOperatorRunOver.pdf



The Washington State Fatality Assessment and Control (WA FACE) program is one of many workplace health and safety programs administered by the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries' Safety & Health & Research for Prevention (SHARP) program. It is a research program designed to identify and study fatal occupational injuries. Under a cooperative agreement with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH grant # 2U600H008487-11), WA FACE collects information on occupational fatalities in WA State and targets specific types of fatalities for evaluation. More information about WA FACE can be found at www.lni.wa.gov/Safety/Research/FACE.