

Mechanic Crushed by Rollaway Container Chassis

SUMMARY

On May 6, 2021, a 62-year-old semi-truck mechanic died when he was crushed by a rollaway container chassis. The previous day, he began repairs on the chassis, which was parked outside of the employer's maintenance shop. He disconnected the air lines to its airbrake chambers, which engaged the parking brake, and left it outdoors for the night. The next day, he coupled a yard tractor to the chassis and tried towing it indoors to avoid the rain. The chassis would not move as its parking brake was still engaged.

The mechanic stopped and exited the tractor leaving it parked on a downgrade with the engine running, parking brake released, and wheels unchocked. He told another mechanic to reconnect the chassis' air lines so its parking brake could be released. He then kneeled between the chassis' wheels and waited while the other mechanic worked. When the air lines were reconnected, the restored air pressure released the chassis' parking brake allowing gravity to pull the tractor and chassis combo downhill. The mechanic was crushed by the wheels of the rolling chassis while the other mechanic, who was still under the chassis, was almost struck by the axles.

Investigators found that the tractor's parking brake was not engaged when necessary and the chassis' wheels were not chocked during vehicle repair operations. The employer's Accident Prevention Plan (APP) or safety program lacked vehicle parking brake and wheel chocking requirements. The APP also had a progressive discipline policy that was unable to correct the mechanic's behavior after causing previous rollaway incidents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Washington State Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) investigators concluded that to protect their workers from similar hazards employers should:

- Install electronic parking brake systems that automatically apply the parking brake when the driver has not set it before exiting the cab.
- Develop APP to include vehicle rollaway hazard identification, assessment, and prevention procedure requirements.
- Develop APP to have progressive discipline policies that effectively address vehicle safety rule violations and prevent hazardous operation.

SHARP Publication # 52-53-2022_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-health/safety-research/files/2022/52_53_2022_MechanicChassisRollaway.pdf



Red X shows where mechanic was trapped and crushed by the rollaway chassis' wheels.