

Family Dairy Farm Worker Dies When Tractor Rolls Down Embankment

SUMMARY

On July 28, 2020, a 56-year-old family dairy farm worker died when his tractor rolled down an embankment. He was operating a tractor built in 1971 that did not have a rollover protective structure (ROPS) and seat belt. The tractor was towing a 25-plus-foot steel, single-axle lagoon pump trailer coupled to its drawbar. The pump trailer had an impeller on the end that had to be moved in and out of the farm's manure pond at several locations to agitate water and cow waste solids stored in the pond. The homogenized mixture was also being pumped from the pond as soil fertilizer through discharge pipes to an irrigation gun in nearby feed crop fields.

To reach the pumping locations, the tractor had to be driven on a narrow, bumpy, and rutted dirt track road on the crest of an earthen embankment that surrounded the pond. The pumping process, which was done biannually and sometimes at night, moved slowly due to the difficulty of repositioning the tractor, trailer, and pipes.

The pond area was dark, as it was two hours before sunrise. The only light came from the tractor and nearby farm buildings. The lone worker was driving the tractor on the embankment road to his final pumping location. The tractor was traveling close to the unmarked edge of the road.

As the tractor turned sharply near its final destination, its front left wheel got caught in a rut that caused the tractor to roll over the edge down the 25-degree outer slope of the embankment. The worker fell to the ground, and the tractor's 3-point hitch fatally pinned him against his back. His wife and son were first to find his crushed body around four hours later. The employer, who was the worker's father, called 911 and used another tractor to lift the rolled tractor off the worker's body so the coroner could take custody of it.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

- Install manufacturer-approved, certified ROPS and seat belts on tractors.
- Develop a formal, written APP with job hazard analysis (JHA) and ROPS and seat belt safety training requirements.
- Improve tractor safety on embankments by assessing road and slope hazards, installing lights, and marking edges of roads with visual cues, such as reflective driveway stakes.

SHARP Publication # 52-54-2023_summary. The full version of this investigation report, along with the detailed recommendations and discussions section, can be found at: http://www.lni.wa.gov/safety-health/safety-research/files/2023/52_54_2023_DairyTractorRollover.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 Assessment & 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# 2U60OH008487), WA FACE collects information on occupational fatalities in WA State and targets specific types of fatalities for evaluation.

More about WA FACE can be found at: www.lni.wa.gov/safety-health/safety-research/ongoing-projects/work-related-fatalities-face

