WASHINGTON State FACE Program
Fatality Assessment & Control Evaluation

AGRICULTURE

FATALITY NARRATIVE

FACE

Farm Worker Crushed in Riding Lawn Mower Rollover

INCIDENT FACTS

REPORT #: 71-270-2025s

REPORT DATE: September 8, 2025

INCIDENT DATE: July 12, 2024

VICTIMS: 67 years old

INDUSTRY: Other Vegetable (except Potato) and Melon Farming Services

OCCUPATION: Farm Worker

SCENE: River levee embankment

EVENT TYPE: Crush - Caught in or between / Machine

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Washington State Department of Labor & Industries

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A 67-year-old farm worker was crushed when his zero-turn riding lawn mower rolled down an embankment. He worked part-time for his employer, a family-run specialty vegetable farm, for four years. He was an experienced land caretaker and mowed the grass each week.

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FATALITY NARRATIVE

FACE

He was operating the mower on top of a grassy, steep embankment between a river and a road. He began working late in the morning and drove the mower to the cutting site about a half mile from the farm's main office. Later in the day the employer noticed that the worker's car was still parked at the office. He called the worker and his foreman but got no answer. He then called his son and drove to the site to check on the worker.

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Fatality Assessment & Control Evaluation

FATALITY NARRATIVE

FACE

He found the worker unresponsive, several feet down the embankment's inner riverside slope with the overturned mower on top of him. He called 911. First responders had the employer remove the mower to free his body, but he died at the scene. No one saw the incident.

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Fatality Assessment & Control Evaluation

FATALITY NARRATIVE

FACE

Following the incident, investigators found:

- The worker was not operating the mower according to the manufacturer's instructions in the following instances: 1) the rollover protective structure (ROPS) was not in the upright position, 2) no seat belt was used, and 3) mowing was taking place where the risk of a rollover was high.
- The riding surface on top of the embankment was 12 feet wide but uneven with steep slopes on both sides, including a three foot drop off on the inner slope, that exposed the worker to rollover hazards.
- There were no overhead obstructions that interfered with using ROPS in the upright position.

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Fatality Assessment & Control Evaluation

FATALITY NARRATIVE

FACE

Photo 1. Mower with ROPS down.

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Photo 2. Close-up view of mower.

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Fatality Assessment & Control Evaluation

FATALITY NARRATIVE

FACE

Photo 3. Mower being recovered.

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Fatality Assessment & Control Evaluation

FATALITY NARRATIVE

FACE

Photo 4. Mower on top of embankment.

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Fatality Assessment & Control Evaluation

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FACE

Photo 5. Eroded drop off on side of inner slope where mower rolled over.

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Fatality Assessment & Control Evaluation

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FACE

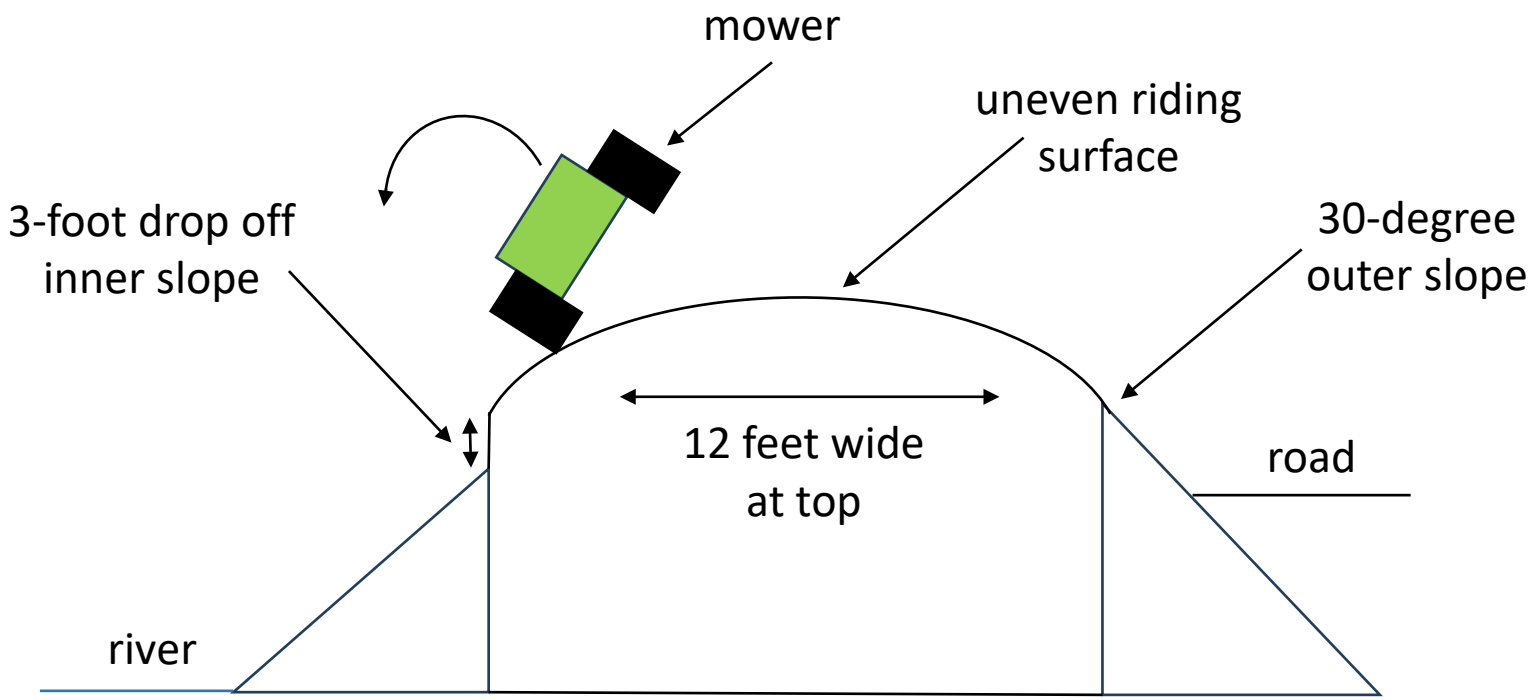

Diagram 1. Cross section diagram of embankment (not to scale).

Requirements

- Make sure employees use all power lawn mowers according to the manufacturer's instructions. See WAC 296-307-22006(6)

WASHINGTON State FACE Program
Fatality Assessment & Control Evaluation

FATALITY NARRATIVE

Recommendations

FACE investigators concluded that, to help prevent similar incidents, employers should:

- Require the use of a walk-behind mower or string trimmer instead of a riding mower in hazardous areas such as embankments, steep slopes, soft ground, bodies of water, edges along bodies of water, and terrain with holes, ruts, bumps or other hidden objects.
- Develop and enforce policy requirements for ROPS and seat belt use and mower operator safety training in their written accident prevention program (APP). At a minimum, the policy should conform to the manufacturer's safety requirements. Review requirements with supervisors and operators at safety meetings and training.

Recommendations

- Perform and document a Job Hazard Analysis (JHA) for riding mowers that identifies and assesses all associated operating hazards. Use the JHA to develop injury prevention controls or hazard solutions.
- Make sure that riding mower operators follow the machine manufacturer's instructions to always use ROPS in the upright position and to wear the provided seat belt.
- Maintain a buffer area at least as wide as the mower between hazards and the mowing area. Do not mow or operate the mower in the hazard area or buffer area.

Resources

Dangers of Roll Overs of Riding Mowers

Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)

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FATALITY NARRATIVE

FACE

This narrative was developed to alert employers and workers of a tragic incident 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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