On August 31, 2014, a 22-year-old hop farm laborer was crushed when a trailer landed on top of him. He was operating a tractor pulling a trailer when the trailer detached and came forward and landed on top of the tractor and crushed him. This was the victim’s first season working at his employer’s hop farm. He had been employed there for six months. His job duties included hauling bales of hops from the field by operating a tractor with a trailer. On the day of the incident, he was operating a utility tractor to tow a 25-foot empty flatbed trailer from the farm’s shop to the equipment storage area. As he was moving through the level dirt yard, the trailer separated from the tractor and bounced up and overtook the tractor. The front of the trailer landed on the tractor. The victim was crushed between the trailer’s frame and the tractor’s steering wheel. Investigators determined that the trailer was incorrectly attached to the tractor. Instead of using a hitch pin to connect the trailer’s tongue to the tractor’s hitch, a bolt was used. There was no physical evidence found at the scene to indicate that the bolt was secured at its bottom to prevent it coming loose. The tractor was found in its highest gear with the hand throttle in the lowest position (indicating that the victim was using the foot throttle to control the tractor’s speed). These two facts suggest that the tractor may have been travelling at a high rate of speed. Additionally, there was no rollover protective structure (ROPS) on the tractor. A ROPS might have provided protection to the operator when the trailer landed on the tractor.

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Statewide Statistics: This was number 53 of 70 work-related fatalities in Washington State during 2014, and was number 7 of 9 agriculture-related fatalities.

This narrative was developed to alert employers and employees of a tragic loss of life of a worker 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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