

Farmer Drowns in Tractor Rollover in Wyoming

SUMMARY

A 71 year old male rancher died from injuries suffered while mowing a horse pasture adjacent to a creek behind his house. The victim had borrowed a tractor and mower from a neighbor and, while mowing, had tipped the tractor over and become pinned under it. He was found by the owner of the tractor five days after the incident had occurred. Evidence at the scene indicates that the victim had been pinned under the tractor tire with his face in the water of a creek that the tractor had fallen into. He had apparently attempted to extricate himself but the attempt was futile.

Employers may be able to minimize the potential for occurrence of this type of incident through the following precautions:

- **discouraging elderly family members from working alone around farm machinery**
- **schedule hazardous routine ranch duties so that elderly family members won't be subjected to added risk**

INTRODUCTION

On a Tuesday afternoon, August 10, 1993 a rancher had borrowed a tractor/mower from a neighbor to mow the horse pasture that lies adjacent to the rancher's home. The borrowed tractor was equipped with a front end loader. Apparently, the victim drove the tractor across a creek and began mowing beyond the creek. As he attempted to mow around a large willow tree growing next to the creek bank, the right front tire of the tractor fell into a large hole along the top of the creek bank, causing the tractor to tip toward the creek. The tractor was overbalanced with the bucket raised in the air and the tractor rolled 1½ times down the hill, coming to rest on it's left side, pinning the left arm of the victim under the left wheel of the tractor.

INVESTIGATION

The WY-Wyoming FACE Project became aware of the incident through a newspaper release on August 18, 1993. Since the incident had occurred more than a week earlier and on-scene photos were taken by the law enforcement investigators, no on-site investigation was conducted. The report is based on the findings of investigating officers of a local law enforcement agency.

The victim was last seen by the neighbor who loaned him the tractor. On-site evidence indicates that the victim drove the tractor to his house and immediately began mowing. He had started by crossing a creek

behind his house and driving to a fenced area beyond the creek. He had mowed a swath along the south side of the pasture and then along the east fence to the creek bank. It seems that the victim then tried to mow under a willow tree that grows next to the creek bank, when the right front tire of the tractor fell into a large hole on the bank.

The front-end loader attached to the tractor had a bucket that had been raised into the air, and it appears that the drop of the tractor tire and the weight of the raised bucket caused the tractor to tip toward the creek. The tractor rolled 1½ times down the bank, ejecting the victim and then rolling onto him, pinning his left arm under the left wheel of the tractor.

It appears from the positioning of the body that the victim had attempted to free himself, as his feet were drawn up against the bank of the creek and his right hand and arm were against the rear fender of the tractor as if he had been trying to push against it. His face and head were in the creek and his head was under water. The coroner estimates that he died within a few minutes of being pinned under the tractor.

CAUSE OF DEATH

The Medical Examiner listed the cause of death as asphyxiation by drowning.

RECOMMENDATIONS/DISCUSSION

This incident could have been prevented by restricting the elderly victim from working around machinery that has potential to cause him harm. Elderly family members who have spent a lifetime ranching or farming often do not accept the dangers that come from combining their reduced capabilities with increasingly powerful machinery. Due to hardships that would be encountered if private landowners were required to meet the rigid standards imposed on other businesses to insure employee safety, farm and ranch owners are not protected from their own actions to the degree that non-farm workers might be. Without that imposed protection, farmers and ranchers should be even more mindful of the dangers inherent in taking actions that are known to be unsafe.

Farm families are generally less protected by OSHA regulations than are employees of business and industry, and therefore need to take special precautions to self-regulate safety within farm/ranch environments. Safety regulations and supervisory oversight should prohibit workers from taking unnecessary risks or being subjected to safety hazards pertinent to the task being conducted. Without the protection of such regulatory oversight in this setting, it is the responsibility of the workers themselves to insure that their actions are not safety hazards.

FATAL ACCIDENT CIRCUMSTANCES AND EPIDEMIOLOGY (Wyoming FACE) PROJECT

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), Division of Safety Research (DSR), performs Fatal Accident Circumstances and Epidemiology (Wyoming FACE) investigations when a participating state reports an occupational fatality and requests technical assistance. The goal of these evaluations is to prevent fatal work injuries in the future by studying the working environment, the

worker, the task the worker was performing, the tools the worker was using, the energy exchange resulting in fatal injury, and the role of management in controlling how these factors interact.

States participating in this study include: Kentucky, Maryland, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

NIOSH Funded/State-based Wyoming FACE Projects providing surveillance and intervention capabilities to show a measurable reduction in workplace fatalities include: Alaska, California, Colorado, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Minnesota, Missouri, Wisconsin and Wyoming.

Additional information regarding this report is available from:

Wyoming Occupational Fatality Analysis Program
522 Hathaway Building - 2300 Capitol Avenue
Cheyenne, WY 82002
(307) 777-5439

Please use information listed on the Contact Sheet on the NIOSH FACE web site to contact [In-house FACE program personnel](#) regarding In-house FACE reports and to gain assistance when State-FACE program personnel cannot be reached.