

## **Rancher Dies in Off-road Tractor Rollover in Wyoming**

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### **SUMMARY**

A 92 year old male rancher died from injuries suffered when the tractor he was driving backed down a ditch and overturned with the victim being thrown under the vehicle. The elderly victim had been digging trenches on ranch land about 2 miles away from the nearest highway, attempting to drain some large puddles from a two-track road. The tractor apparently rolled down a small hill and overturned. The victim was found some two hours after the incident occurred, lying on his back under the tractor with both feet on the ground with his knees slightly bent his head resting on a log.

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**
- **attempting to conduct necessary maintenance/repair to farm & ranch roads before an elderly family member can decide to do it himself.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

On the morning of June 11, 1993 an elderly rancher was driving a tractor equipped with a ditching tool, attempting to drain some large puddles that had collected on a two-track ranch road in a wooded area on ranch land. He had left a town some thirty miles away earlier that morning, and was seen at that time by his grand-sons.

### **INVESTIGATION**

The WY-Wyoming FACE Project became aware of the incident through a newspaper article received through a clipping service on June 18, 1993. Reports and copies of on-scene photos were requested and received from local law enforcement and coroner's offices and an analysis was made from those reports.

The victim's grandsons had seen him earlier on the morning of the incident in a town about 30 miles from the incident site. Some 3½ hours later, they went to the incident site to check on him and found him lying under the overturned tractor. The victim was found at the bottom of a small hill, lying on his back with both feet on the ground and with his knees slightly bent. His head was resting on a small log among several pieces of fallen timber. The body was located under the tractor, but was not pinned by it.

The area where the incident occurred was wet and muddy and was surrounded by dry ground. There were no footprints in the mud and it appears that the victim drove the tractor into the muddy area, backed it over a hill, and dropped the ditching tool to dig a trench that would allow pooled water to flow off the roadway onto lower ground. There was only one set of tractor tracks in the mud indicating that it was the first attempt to dig the ditch. Scrape marks indicated that the tractor had slid down the small hill about 15' before overturning. The tractor then came to rest on its top with the top of the ditching tool against the ground and the front tires wedged against fallen timber.

The coroner determined that the incident had occurred around 2½ hours prior to discovery and around 1 hour after the victim was last seen in the nearby town. There were no fractures identified to the skull and no gross fractures identified to the spine. There were multiple bilateral rib fractures with air visibly dissecting along the outer margins of the chest wall. The injuries were seen as resulting from the tractor rollover.

## **CAUSE OF DEATH**

The Medical Examiner listed the cause of death as cardiopulmonary arrest due to traumatic suffocation due to massive chest trauma as a consequence of a tractor roll-over.

## **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 workplace 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 work habits are not safety hazards.

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## **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.

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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.**