

FACE Investigation 89C0006

SUBJECT: Automobile Repair Business Owner Killed When Auto He Was Working on Slipped Off the Supporting Hydraulic Jacks.

Introduction:

The Colorado Department of Health (CDH) performs investigations of occupational fatalities under the authority of the Colorado revised Statutes and Board of Health regulations which require the department to establish and operate a program to monitor and investigate those conditions which affect public health and are preventable. The goal of the case investigation is to prevent work injuries in the future, by study of: the working environment, the worker, the task the worker was performing, the tools the worker was using, and the role of management in controlling how these factors interact.

This report is generated and distributed to fulfill the Department's duty to provide relevant education to the community on methods to prevent severe occupational injuries.

A 49 year old owner of an automobile repair business was killed when an auto he was working on slipped off the supporting hydraulic jacks.

Contacts/Activities:

A review of death certificates by Colorado Department of Health prompted the initiation of an investigation of this accident. A meeting was held with the employee witness, the accident site was photographed, and co-ordination was made with the medical examiner, police and fire departments.

Overview of Employers Safety Program:

The employer had been in the automotive repair business in excess of twenty years. The business had one employee in addition to the owner/operator.

The employer did not have an active safety program or hazardous communication program. The operation being performed was a normal activity by the company and the victim.

Synopsis of events:

The fatal accident occurred on a Tuesday morning at approximately 1100 hours. The vehicle involved had been left in the shop to find and eliminate a strong vibration. The victim and a helper lifted the auto with hydraulic jacks placed under both the front and rear bumpers. The vehicle was lifted to a point that gave 18-20 inches clearance. The victim then went under the vehicle on a creeper. The victim instructed the helper to start the engine and place the transmission into "Drive". When this was done a strong vibration was immediately present. The vehicle vibrated off the jacks and dropped onto the victim.

Emergency services were notified immediately and arrived on the scene at 1109 hours. The helper and a bystander used a hydraulic floor jack to lift the vehicle and rescue personnel extracted the victim and began CPR. The victim was transported to a local hospital where he was pronounced dead at 1150 hours.

Cause of Death:

The cause of death was determined by autopsy to be massive skull fracture and multiple bilateral rib fractures

Recommendations/Discussions:

Recommendation #1: After lifting a vehicle to the desired height it should be blocked, cribbed or secured at once.

Discussion: In this instance where the automobile had been lifted to allow access to the undercarriage, the use of blocking or jack stands under the frame could have prevented the slippage of the vehicle off the bumper jacks.

Recommendation #2: Employers should develop and implement comprehensive written safety programs.

Discussion: This employer did not have a written comprehensive safety program. Even small companies should evaluate the tasks performed by workers, identify all potential hazards. The employer should develop and implement a safety program addressing these hazards and implement appropriate control measures. The employer should provide worker training in safe work procedures.

Lyle E. McKenzie
Industrial Hygienist
Occupational Epidemiology Section
Environmental Epidemiology Division
Colorado Department of Health

Distribution:

Employer of Victim
NIOSH, DSR
DR. RICHARD HOFFMAN
DR. WILLIAM MARINE
JANE MCCAMMON
CAROL GARRETT
SHARON KEEFER
ROGER VANCIL
DR. THOMAS VERNON/TOM LOOBY/KEN MESCH
CO. DIV. OF RISK MANAGEMENT
CSU (OSHA CONSULTATION)
COLORADO CORONER'S ASS'N
OSHA AREA 8 OFFICE
OSHA REGION OFFICE
NIOSH REGIONAL OFFICE
UNIONS (THE UNION OF THE VICTIM AND RELATED UNIONS FOR THE
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CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION
COLORADO SAFETY ASSOCIATION
NATIONAL SAFETY COUNCIL
COUNTY HEALTH DEPT (COUNTY OF ACCIDENT)