

February 13, 1998

Nebraska FACE Investigation 97NE045

SUBJECT:

Farmer Crushed in Stacker

SUMMARY:

A 57-year-old farmer was killed when he was caught between the lower tailgate and the upper tailgate of a stacking machine. He had been stacking corn stalks and for some reason went to the rear of the stacker. The tractor, which was connected to the stacker and provided operating power to the stacker, was left running. There was also a dog in the cab of the tractor. While the victim was at the rear of the stacker, he was crushed when the lower tailgate was raised. The dog possibly could have bumped or leaned against the hydraulic controls, which caused the lower tailgate to raise.

The Nebraska Department of Labor investigator concluded that to prevent future similar occurrences:

- * Power to activate the stacker should be shut off prior to working in or around the stacker.
- * Animals should not be left unattended in areas where they could activate machinery.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVE:

The goal of the Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) workplace investigation is to prevent work-related deaths or injuries in the future by a 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 **solely** for the purpose of providing current, relevant

education to employers, their employees and the community on methods to prevent occupational fatalities and injuries.

INTRODUCTION:

On November 26, 1997, at approximately 10:00 p.m., a 57-year-old farmer was killed when he was crushed in a stacker. The Nebraska Department of Labor became aware of the fatality via the newspaper on December 1, 1997. Some information for this report was obtained from the county sheriff's office and the city police department. The Nebraska FACE Investigator also conducted a site visit on January 27, 1998, and interviewed the victim's wife and an individual who was one of the first people on the scene after the incident.

The victim had been farming for 38 years and for 29 years he had been at the incident farm site. The farm was run by the victim and his wife. There were no other employees at the time of the incident.

INVESTIGATION:

On the evening of the incident, the victim left his house sometime after 8:30 p.m. to go out in the field to "loaf stover". In this case he was using a stacker to form corn stalks into loaves. A picture of a stacker like the one involved in this incident is at figure 1. An individual saw the tractor and stacker moving in the field around 9:30 p.m. The victim's wife awoke at 3:30 a.m. on November 27, 1997, and noticed that her husband was not in the house. She went out in the field where the tractor and stacker were and said she did not notice anyone around. The tractor was running at this time but was not moving. She went back to the house and called the police and told them her husband was missing in the field. The police responded and arrived on the scene within several minutes. When the police officer arrived he noticed the lights on the tractor were on, the door was open, the tractor was running and a dog was in the cab of the tractor. About five minutes after the police arrived, fire rescue personnel arrived on the scene. One of those responding was familiar with the stacker. Upon examining the stacker, they noted the victim's foot protruding from the bottom of the closed rear gate and also that the rear gate was not completely closed (see figure 2). The individual familiar with the stacker entered the tractor cab and activated the hydraulic control which lowered the rear gate. The rescue team removed the

victim from the rear of the stacker, checked for vital signs and determined that he had expired several hours previously.

There were no witnesses to the incident, but it appears the victim was at the rear of the stacker standing on the tailgate with the tractor running. The hydraulic control lever which raises and lowers the tailgate was the highest control lever in a cluster of four levers (see figure 3). It is highly probable that the dog, which was in the cab of the tractor, bumped or leaned against the upper control lever which caused the tailgate to raise, crushing the victim. This tractor cab had an area behind the seat where the dog would sit while the victim was running the tractor.

CAUSE OF DEATH:

The cause of death, as stated on the death certificate, was crushing pressure and injury to chest.

RECOMMENDATIONS/DISCUSSION:

Recommendation #1: **Power to activate the stacker should be shut off prior to working in or around the stacker.**

Discussion: The operating manual that came with this particular stacker has a Safety Precautions section which states “Always disengage PTO and shut off engine before 1. leaving tractor seat; 2. lubricating; 3. cleaning the machine; or 4. adjusting the machine.” Since there were no witnesses, we do not know what the victim was doing at the rear of the stacker, however, had the tractor been shut off prior to leaving the tractor seat, this incident could have been prevented.

Recommendation #2: **Animals should not be left unattended in areas where they could activate machinery.**

Discussion: The dog that was in the tractor cab at the time of the incident was a German Shepard/Rottweiler mix and approximately 6 to 8 months old. It is possible the dog could have activated the hydraulic control lever by jumping from the back of the seat in the cab of the tractor to the front of the seat, or vice versa. It is also possible the dog could have been sitting in the tractor seat and leaned against the control lever with enough pressure to activate it.

Operators should constantly be aware of the possibility of inadvertent equipment activation and the energy source (in this case, possibly the dog) to initiate that activation.