



The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)



Farmer Dies After Being Run Over by a Tractor He was Driving

Minnesota FACE 94MN028

SUMMARY

A 50-year-old male farmer (victim), died from injuries sustained when he was either thrown off or fell from the tractor he was driving and was run over by one of the rear tires. The tractor was not equipped with an enclosed cab, a seat belt, or a rollover protective structure. It had a wide front end and was equipped with dual rear wheels. The victim was checking drainage tile and water levels in his farm fields at the time of the incident. He was driving east through an alfalfa field and had just made a 90-degree right turn onto a field road. He was found on the field road a short distance from the point of making the right turn. The tractor was found in a plowed field, with the transmission shifted into either fifth or sixth gear, approximately 50-100 feet southeast of the victim. The tractor stalled when it veered into the field where its front wheels turned sharply and cut deeply into the plowed soil. MN FACE investigators concluded that, in order to reduce the likelihood of similar occurrences, the following guidelines should be followed:

- all tractors should be equipped with a seat belt and a rollover protective structure; and
- operators should use only the lower range gears when driving tractors in farm fields.

INTRODUCTION

On May 18, 1994, MN FACE investigators were notified of a farm work-related fatality which occurred on April 16, 1994. The county sheriff's department was interviewed, and a copy of their report of the incident was obtained. A site investigation was not conducted by MN FACE investigators.

INVESTIGATION

This investigation is based on a review, by MN FACE investigators, of a written sheriff's report of the incident.

A 50-year-old male farmer (victim) died from injuries sustained when he was either thrown off or fell from the tractor he was driving and was run over by one of the rear tires. The tractor was not equipped with either an enclosed cab or with a rollover protective structure and seat belt. It had a wide front end and was equipped with dual rear wheels.

He was checking drainage tile and water levels in his farm fields at the time of the incident. He was driving east through an alfalfa field and had just made a 90-degree right turn onto a field road. He was found on the field road a short distance from the point of making the right turn. The tractor was found approximately 50-100 feet southeast of the victim in a plowed field. The tractor stalled when it veered into the field where its front wheels turned sharply and cut deeply into the plowed soil.

The victim was found by his wife approximately 45 minutes after he drove from the farm yard on the tractor. She informed members of the sheriff's department that when she arrived at the incident site, the tractor was stalled a short distance from her husband. She told the officers that the engine was not running and that the transmission was in either fifth or sixth gear.

Emergency medical service personnel were called to the farm. They had to walk to the victim because of wet field road conditions which prevented them from driving to the incident site. They found the victim not breathing and began resuscitation efforts at the scene. Resuscitation efforts continued as he was transported to a local hospital where he was pronounced dead on arrival.

CAUSE OF DEATH

The cause of death listed on the death certificate was bilateral tension pneumothorax due to bilateral rib fractures.

RECOMMENDATIONS/DISCUSSION

Recommendation #1: All tractors should be equipped with a seat belt and a rollover protective structure.

Discussion: Preventing operators from falling off tractors requires the use of a seat belt. A seat belt alone should not be installed and used on tractors which do not have a rollover protective structure. The use of a seat belt on tractors without a rollover protective structure eliminates the possibility of an operator being thrown clear of the tractor in the event of a rollover. Many older tractors are in use on family farms and do not have a seat belt and a rollover protective structure to protect the operators. All older tractors should be retrofitted with a seat belt and a properly designed, manufactured, and installed rollover protective structure. If the tractor involved in this incident had been retrofitted with a seat belt and a rollover protective structure and if the seat belt had been in use at the time of this incident, this fatality might have been prevented.

Recommendation #2: Operators should use only the lower range gears when driving tractors in farm fields.

Discussion: Tractor operators should always maintain safe operating speeds to reduce the potential of being thrown from the tractor. The tractor involved in this incident was found with the transmission shifted into either fifth or sixth gear. These gears are designed to enable the tractor to travel at speeds between twelve to sixteen miles per hour. They are not designed for use when the tractor is operated in farm fields. They are intended for use only when the tractor is being operated on smooth surfaced roadways. The use of these gears while driving a tractor in rough and uneven farm fields may result in an operator being thrown from the tractor. If the tractor involved in this incident had been operated in a lower gear and at a slower speed, the potential for the operator being thrown from the tractor would have been reduced, and this fatality might have been prevented.

REFERENCES

1. Agriculture Safety, Fundamentals of Machine Operation, 1987, Deere & Company, Moline, Illinois, Third Edition.

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