

FACE 96-10

Logger Dies After Falling From Log Skidder--South Carolina

SUMMARY

A 39-year-old male skidder operator (the victim) died after falling from a skidder tire into knee-deep water. The victim was a member of a crew logging a 50-acre tract of swampland. The victim and another operator were operating dual-tire skidders, dragging the logs to the landing to be loaded onto trucks. The victim hauled three logs to the landing, and was preparing to unhook the choker from the third log when the incident occurred. The victim left the cab of the skidder and stepped onto the right-rear dual-wheels of the skidder and jumped down to the logs. The second skidder operator, 100 yards away, saw the victim slip and fall into the water trying to climb back up the skidder tire. When the second operator saw that the victim did not stand up, he drove his skidder toward the victim. Due to deep water and heavy brush in the swamp, it took the second operator approximately five minutes to reach the victim. When he reached the victim, he pulled him up on a log and initiated cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). The job foreman signaled the loader operator to call 911 from the company truck, then assisted with the CPR. The emergency medical service arrived within 15 minutes and called the county coroner. The victim was pronounced dead at the scene by the county coroner. NIOSH investigators concluded that, in order to prevent similar circumstances, employers should:

- instruct workers to use the means of access and egress to machinery that are incorporated into the design of the machinery.

INTRODUCTION

On February 21, 1996, a 39-year-old male skidder operator (the victim) died after falling from skidder tires into knee-deep water. On February 26, 1996, officials of the South Carolina Occupational Safety and Health Administration (SCOSHA) notified the Division of Safety Research (DSR) of this fatality, and requested technical assistance. On March 20, 1996 a DSR safety specialist and medical officer conducted an investigation of the incident. The incident was reviewed with the company owner, the SCOSHA compliance officer, and the county coroner and sheriff. The incident site was photographed during the investigation.

The employer in this instance was a logging operation that specialized in wet logging in swampy areas and employed six workers. The employer had been in operation for ten years, and had a written safety policy and written safe-work procedures. Safety meetings were conducted on-site by the job foreman, who was responsible for safety at the work site. Training was conducted on the job. This was the first fatality experienced by the

employer. The victim had worked for the employer for ten years and had just returned to work after a 3-week vacation.

INVESTIGATION

The employer had purchased the timber rights to a fifty-acre tract of swampland. The hardwood timber was to be harvested, then cut to customer specifications at the employer's sawmill. A six-man crew (a tract buncher operator, two skidder operators, including the victim, a loader operator, a feller/bucker, and a foreman) was sent to the site to perform the work.

On the day of the incident, the two dual-tired skidder operators were dragging felled and bucked (limbed and cut to size) trees to the landing to be loaded onto trucks. The victim was in the process of hooking up his third log when the second skidder passed by him on the way to the landing. The second skidder operator heard a loud pop and thought the winch cable on the victim's skidder had broken. He continued on to the landing, thinking he would help the victim on his return trip. The second operator was approximately 100 yards from the victim on his return trip when he saw the victim standing on a stump at the rear of the skidder. The victim then tried climbing up the right-rear skidder tires and frame to the operator's cab. The second operator saw the victim slip and fall into the water, possibly striking his head on one of the skidder's cable rollers. When the second skidder operator saw that the victim did not stand up, he drove his machine toward the victim. Because of areas of deep water and heavy brush in the swamp, it took him five minutes to reach the victim. He found the victim face down in the water, about six inches below the surface. He pulled the victim onto a log and initiated cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). He called to the loader operator to get the foreman. When the foreman arrived, he told the loader operator to call 911 from the company truck, then assisted the second skidder operator. They lifted the victim onto the skidder's wheels and continued CPR. When the emergency medical service arrived, one of the paramedics was taken by a skidder to the site approximately 3 mile into the swamp. Motor vehicle passage was not possible due to the mud and water. The paramedic returned in approximately 15 minutes and stated that the victim was dead. Sheriff's deputies who had arrived at the site summoned the coroner. When the coroner arrived, he was transported to the site by skidder and pronounced the victim dead. An abrasion was found on the right side of the victim's forehead, but it could not be determined if it was caused by the victim's head striking a cable roller. Results of the autopsy are pending.

CAUSE OF DEATH

The medical examiner listed -- (Still pending. Drug and alcohol involvement are suspected pending autopsy. This could add a recommendation on evaluating a worker's condition prior to work.)

RECOMMENDATIONS/DISCUSSION

Recommendation #1: Employers should instruct workers to use the means of access and egress to machinery that are incorporated into the design of the machinery.

Discussion: In this instance the victim was exposed to a slipping and fall hazard by climbing the tire to access the operator's cab. The exposure was compounded by the wet work environment and mud and water on the tires. The skidder was equipped with a steel-grated step and hand hold that could have been used to access the operator's cab and would have lessened the exposure to the slipping and fall hazard.