



The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)

Promoting productive workplaces
through safety and health research



Truck Driver Dies After Being Struck By Log That Fell From Logging Truck—North Carolina

FACE 9508

SUMMARY

A 54-year-old male truck driver (the victim) had been observing the loading of his logging truck when a 35-foot-long black pine log was dislodged from the top of the load and fell off the side, striking and killing him. The victim was part of a 12-person crew that was performing logging operations in a rural part of the State when the incident occurred. The victim had driven his logging truck into the loading deck area, parked, dismounted and moved to a safe position to observe the loading of the truck. At about 11:15 a.m., the victim noticed a piece of wire on top of the load, as well as two logs which still had limbs attached. He signaled the loader machine operator, who stopped his machine and asked the victim what he wanted. After informing the loader operator of the wire and limb conditions, the victim again walked to a safe position to observe the loader operator remove the wire and limbs with the loader's grappling device. After removing the wire and a limb from the first log, the loader operator began removing a limb from a second log. As the limb was being removed it twisted, causing the log to buck and kick a 35-foot log over the trailer standards. When the loader operator turned the machine, he saw the victim lying on the ground with the log lying on top of him. The operator jumped from the machine and sawed the log in half to free the victim. The operator informed the employer who called the emergency medical service (EMS). The EMS arrived in 6 to 8 minutes and transported the victim to the area hospital where he was pronounced dead on arrival. NIOSH investigators concluded that, to prevent similar occurrences, employers should:

- **ensure that log truck drivers and other workers stay clear of loading operations until loads are stabilized**
- **develop, implement and enforce a written safety program which includes, but is not limited to, worker training in hazard identification, avoidance and abatement**
- **designate a competent person to conduct regular safety inspections**
- **encourage workers to actively participate in workplace safety.**

INTRODUCTION

On February 7, 1995, a 54-year-old male truck driver (the victim) was killed after being struck on the head by a log that had fallen off his logging truck. On February 17, 1995, officials of the North Carolina Occupational Safety and Health Administration (NCOSHA) notified the Division of Safety Research (DSR) of this fatality and requested technical assistance. On March 16, 1995, a DSR safety specialist conducted an investigation of this incident. The investigator reviewed the incident with the NCOSHA compliance officer assigned to the case and obtained the medical examiner's report and illustrations of the incident site.

The employer in this incident was a logging company that had been in business for 37 years and employed 12 workers, 5 of whom drove tractor trailers similar to the one the victim operated. The employer did not have a written safety program, but reportedly conducted safety talks on a regular basis. The victim had about 23 years of experience in the logging business. This incident was the second fatality the company had experienced.

INVESTIGATION

The logging company had leased timber rights on a 50-acre tract of privately owned land. The timber was clearcut and transported to different sawmills and chipping operations in the area. The tract of soft and hardwood timber was in the process of being felled, limbed, cut to length, graded, sorted and transported. The timber was being harvested by a crew of 12 people which included 6 machine operators (operating three skidders, two feller bunchers, and one loader), 5 tractor-trailer operators, and 1 person working on the ground topping and limbing trees. The terrain was a gentle rolling mountain slope with less than a 5-percent grade, and environmental conditions were favorable. The incident occurred within 1 day of completion of the timbering job.

On the morning of the incident, the victim had delivered several loads of logs to a processing plant. At about 11 a.m., the victim drove his tractor-trailer logging truck onto the loading deck for another load. He dismounted the tractor and proceeded to an area about 25 to 30 feet away from the loading operation. The victim engaged in conversation with another truck driver who was also waiting for his truck to be loaded. Near the end of the loading operation, the victim walked around his truck and signaled the loading machine operator, who stopped the loading machine and asked the victim what he wanted. The victim responded that a piece of wire and a few limbs needed to be removed from the top of the load. The victim then returned to the truck driver with whom he had been talking a safe distance of 25-30 feet away, and asked him if he had wire cutters in his truck. The truck driver responded "no, but the bossman might have," and turned and walked toward his truck. In the interim, using the loader's grappling device, the loader operator had removed the wire and one limb from the top of the load. As the loader operator began removing the second limb from another log, the limb twisted, causing the log to buck and kick a 35-foot log over the trailer standards and the end of a longer log to fall to the ground. When the loader operator turned the machine, he saw the victim lying on the ground about 8-10 feet from the trailer with the 35-foot log lying on top of him (Figure). The operator jumped from the machine and sawed the log in half to free the victim. The operator informed the employer, who called the EMS. The EMS arrived in 6 to 8 minutes and transported the victim to the area hospital where he was pronounced dead on arrival.

CAUSE OF DEATH

The medical examiner's report listed the cause of death as blunt force injuries to the head.

RECOMMENDATIONS/DISCUSSION

Recommendation #1: Employers should ensure that log truck drivers and other workers stay clear of loading operations until loads are stabilized.

Discussion: In this incident the victim was in the area between the truck and loader and may have been walking toward the employer to retrieve wire cutters while log loading operations were being conducted. It is imperative that workers understand and adhere to procedures that prohibit workers from entering the loading deck area. Also, loading machine operators should be aware of the presence and location of other workers and be certain they are out of the danger area before using the loader.

Recommendation #2: Employers should develop, implement and enforce a written safety program which includes, but is not limited to, worker training in hazard identification, avoidance and abatement.

Discussion: The victim was struck and killed by a log that fell off the logging truck when the loader operator tried to break a limb from a log that was resting on top of the loaded truck. Employers should evaluate tasks performed by workers; identify all potential hazards; and then develop, implement, and enforce written safe work procedures addressing these issues.

Although verbal procedures existed for working on and around the loading deck which included staying clear of the tractor-trailer until loading was completed, they were not followed. The safety program should include at a minimum, worker training in hazard identification, and the avoidance and abatement of these hazards. Workers should receive formal safety training pertinent to their work on a periodic basis. An effective training program includes a written job description containing step-by-step procedures, a list of the hazards within each step of the procedures, and an explanation of ways to overcome these hazards. Periodic safety training will increase logging industry employees' awareness of the hazards confronting them.

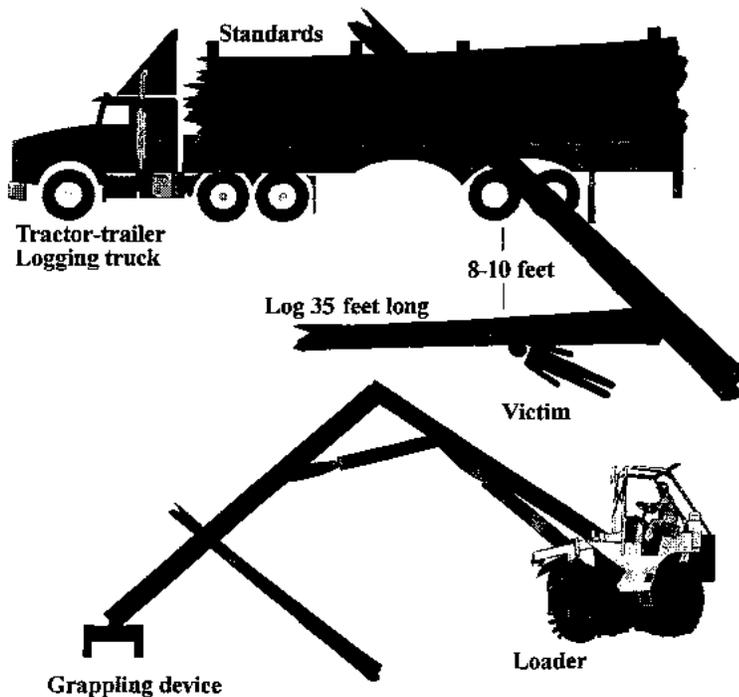
Recommendation #3: Employers should designate a competent person to conduct regular safety inspections.

Discussion: Conducting regular safety inspections of all logging tasks by a competent person has the authority to take prompt corrective measures to eliminate them. will help ensure that established company safety procedures are being followed. Additionally, scheduled and unscheduled safety inspections of mechanized tree-felling worksites clearly demonstrate that the employer is committed to the safety program and to the prevention of occupational injury.

Recommendation #4: Employers should encourage workers to actively participate in workplace safety.

Discussion: Employers should encourage all workers to actively participate in workplace safety and ensure that all workers understand the role they play in the prevention of occupational injury. In this instance, the victim apparently walked between the trailer and loader machine while loading operations were being conducted. Employers must instruct workers of their responsibility to participate in making the workplace safer. Increased worker participation will aid in the prevention of occupational injury.

**Figure. Logging Incident Site
(Loading Deck)
FACE 95-08**



Not to scale
Figure.

Was this page helpful?

Yes

Partly

No