

Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation Project

Public Health

KY FACE #97KY073

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SUBJECT: Logger Crushed During Repair Work on Skidder

SUMMARY

A 56-year-old full-time logger (the victim) was killed while working with his son at a logging site. On the morning of the incident, the victim and his son made repairs to the brakes on a skidder which belonged to the owner of the small logging company. As the two loggers were working at the site that afternoon, the brakes malfunctioned again. To make repairs, the victim laid down on his back underneath the skidder which was parked on a slightly inclined dirt path. As he loosened the brakes with a wrench, the skidder began to roll down the slight incline and he was dragged between the wheels for about 75 feet before the vehicle came to a stop. The victim's son was working nearby and heard the skidder pass down the hill behind him. Upon finding his father, he ran to the field nearby where the farmer who owned the land was out on his tractor. The farmer called 911 for help. Rescue personnel arrived on the scene but found that the victim had suffered severe injuries; he was pronounced dead at the scene. In order to prevent similar incidents from occurring, FACE investigators recommend that employers should:

- train employees to take precautions that ensure the stability of equipment before making repairs
- ensure that equipment is in good working condition
- develop and enforce a written safety program which includes, but is not limited to, worker training in hazard identification, avoidance and abatement.

INTRODUCTION

On July 25, 1997, KY FACE was informed of the death of a 56-year-old full-time logger on July 22. An investigation was initiated. An interview was conducted with the county coroner who also accompanied this investigator to the site. Photographs taken at the scene by the coroner were reviewed. Copies were obtained of the death certificate and coroner's report. Interviews were conducted via phone with the victim's son and wife. The owner of the business (and skidder) was unavailable for an interview.

The victim had been in the logging industry all of his life. He worked for a small logging company that employed two or three people at a time depending on the work load. The company was leasing land from a farmer for logging purposes and they had been at this site for about a month. The owner did not usually accompany the loggers to the work site and was not present on the day of this incident. There were no safety policies in place at this logging business.

The older model Athey skidder that was being used at the site to haul the cut trees belonged to the owner of the company. It was in fair condition but recently had been having brake problems. Most repairs to the equipment were made by the victim and his son. According to the victim's son, the owner was unaware that the brakes on the skidder had not been working properly.

The victim was on medication for heart problems and high blood pressure. Although he had not been feeling well the day prior to the incident, he had told his wife that he was feeling good before leaving for work on the day the incident occurred.

INVESTIGATION

On the day of the fatal incident, the weather was hot and humid. The victim and his son left for the logging site in the morning to repair the skidder's brakes which had been "sticking." After making the repairs, the two loggers went home to have lunch then returned to the site about 1 pm. As usual, the victim and his son were the only workers at the site that day; the owner was not present. As they arrived back at the site, they saw that the farmer who owned the land was working outside in the field which bordered the wooded area.

They had been working for about 45 minutes when the brakes became stuck on the skidder and the victim decided to make repairs at the site in order to finish the day's work. To make the necessary repairs, the victim laid on his back underneath the skidder which was parked on a slightly inclined dirt path. When the victim loosened the brakes, the vehicle began to roll down the slight incline. The victim had no time to move out of the way and was crushed by the wheels and then dragged about 75 feet before the vehicle came to rest against some trees on the edge of the path. The son was working near the dirt path and heard the skidder pass down the hill behind him. Upon finding his father, he ran to the field where the farmer was working to get help. 911 was called and EMS personnel were dispatched at 2:27 pm, arriving on the scene at 2:39. The coroner surmised that the victim had been killed instantly and pronounced him dead at the scene.

CAUSE OF DEATH

According to the death certificate, the cause of death was blunt trauma to the chest. No autopsy was performed.

RECOMMENDATIONS/DISCUSSION

Recommendation #1: Employers should train employees to take precautions that ensure the stability of equipment before making repairs.

Discussion: Because the brakes were not working properly on the skidder, taking extra precautions to ensure the stability of the vehicle before beginning repairs may have averted this tragedy. Ideally, the vehicle should be on level ground during repairs. If this is not possible, the wheels on the equipment should be chocked to restrain movement. In this case, chocking the front and back wheels with a log may have kept the vehicle from rolling down the slight incline.

Recommendation #2: Employers should ensure that equipment is in good working condition.

Discussion: Employers should ensure a safe working environment for their employees which includes maintaining equipment in proper working condition. Inspections and maintenance should be conducted on a routine basis to ensure the equipment is safe. Older equipment, such as the skidder in this case, may need more frequent maintenance to keep it in proper working condition.

Recommendation #3: Employers should develop and enforce a written safety program which includes, but is not limited to, worker training in hazard identification, avoidance and abatement.

Discussion: The employer in this incident had no safety program in place. In this case, a safety program should include discussion on safely making repairs to equipment. Because repairs must occasionally be made while at the job site, a safety program should include identifying potential hazards and how to address these issues to make the work environment safe and reduce the risk of injury.