

Public Health

KY FACE #96KY07101

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To: Carl Spurlock, PhD, Director of the Kentucky Injury Prevention and Research Center (KIPRC)

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Subject: Farmer Killed When Caught in Hay Baler

SUMMARY

A 48-year-old part-time farmer was using a roll baler to bale hay on his farm around noon on a Saturday. Although there were no eyewitnesses to the event, it is believed that a machine malfunction occurred and he got off the tractor to try and force hay into the baler with his foot. His shoe or his pant leg became entangled in the tines of the baler and he was pulled into the machine.

In order to prevent similar incidents, FACE investigators recommend that:

- machinery always be turned off before the operator gets off or attempts to work on it;*
- equipment be maintained in good working condition; and,*
- when possible, operators of heavy equipment should not work alone.*

INTRODUCTION

On July 9, 1996, FACE investigators were informed of the July 6 death of a 48-year-old farmer. An investigation was immediately initiated. The coroner who investigated the case was interviewed by telephone. He informed the investigator that there were no witnesses, and that the baler had been destroyed, so it would not be possible to photograph it. Under the circumstances, it was decided that a site visit was not warranted. This report is based solely on information shared by the coroner who was at the scene.

INVESTIGATION

The victim was a part-time farmer who was also employed at a nearby manufacturing company. The incident occurred on a Saturday, when he was baling hay with an International roll baler. He had experienced a previous incident where his pant leg was torn off by the baler when he tried to force hay into it. It is believed that he was attempting the same thing on this occasion. His brother was working on the other side of a hill, approximately 100 yards away, digging a basement for his home. Around noon, the brother saw smoke rising and went to investigate. He

found the victim caught inside the baler, which was burning. Apparently the belts slipping had created friction that caused the machine to blaze. The brother drove the machine into a nearby creek to extinguish the fire, but the victim was already burned over 100 percent of his body. The brother's call for emergency services brought both the ambulance service and the rescue squad. The coroner was called at 1:00 pm.

The rescue squad attempted to remove the victim using the "jaws of life," to no avail. A neighbor was called to cut the baler with a cutting torch. It was necessary to totally destroy the machine in order to remove the victim's body; the removal process took approximately two hours (until about 3:30 pm). The coroner pronounced the victim dead at 1:25 pm.

CAUSE OF DEATH

Cause of death was listed as "cardiopulmonary arrest due to traumatic shock."

RECOMMENDATIONS/DISCUSSION

Recommendation #1: Machinery should always be turned off before the operator gets off or attempts to work on it.

Discussion: It should be a habit to shut off the power before attempting to service any type of machinery. No service activities should be commenced until all rotating parts have stopped. In this case an attempt was made to force hay into the baler. The victim had performed this procedure before, losing a pant leg in the process. Had the tines of the baler not been rotating, he could not have become entangled.

Recommendation #2: Equipment should be maintained in good working condition.

Discussion: Since the baler in this case was destroyed in the process of extracting the victim, it could not be determined whether there had been a malfunction, or what condition the machine was in prior to the incident. It is possible, however, that an equipment malfunction caused the victim to try and force the hay into the baler.

Recommendation #3: When possible, operators of heavy equipment should not work alone.

Discussion: The large proportion of occupational fatalities that are attributable to machines such as the hay baler in this case indicates the need for another person to be present when such machines are operated. In many cases, immediate notification of emergency medical personnel could make a crucial difference.