

Public Health

KY FACE #96KY04601

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

From: Amy Scheerer, FACE Investigator, and Tim Struttman, FACE Project Manager

Subject: Logs Roll Off Truck at Sawmill Killing the Truck Driver

SUMMARY

A 64-year-old male (the victim) was killed while unloading logs at a sawmill. Since retiring from the mining industry several years ago, he had been working part-time driving a semi-trailer truck owned by a logger. As was his usual practice, the victim drove the truck alone, and on the day of the incident hauled a large load of logs on the trailer bed. The logs were approximately 12 inches in diameter and 20-25 feet long. Stakes on the sides of the trailer bed were four feet high; witnesses reported that the logs were stacked approximately four feet higher than the stakes. Drivers are not required to check in upon arrival, and the sawmill has no guidelines in place for unloading procedures. The victim arrived about 9:00 am and began the unloading procedure before any employees of the mill came to assist. Each stack of logs on the truck was bound by two chains having one-inch links, which were rusted and in poor condition. The victim unhooked the chain nearest the front of the truck. As he began releasing the second chain, the load of logs shifted and the chain broke. Three logs rolled off the truck and struck the victim. Although the incident was unwitnessed, an employee of the mill who was working in the yard at the time heard an unusual sound and looked over to find the victim on the ground. Emergency medical services (EMS) were called to the scene immediately and the victim was pronounced dead at 9:45 am.

In order to prevent similar incidents from occurring, FACE investigators recommend:

- *The height of the stack of logs should not exceed the height of the standards on the truck*
- *Routine safety inspections should be made to ensure that equipment is in proper condition*
- *Written policies should be in place regarding unloading procedures for loggers at the mill, and the policies should be enforced by mill owners*
- *Loggers and log-truck drivers should attend the Master Logger Program*
- *Lawmakers should consider initiating regulations to limit the height of log stacks on vehicles traveling on public roadways*

INTRODUCTION

FACE investigators were informed of the death of a logger on 25 April 1996. An investigation was initiated and a site visit made on 22 May 1996. Interviews were held with the owner of the sawmill and the deputy coroner who was present at the scene. Photographs of the scene were viewed and copies obtained of the death certificate and coroner's report.

The owner of the sawmill had started the business in January 1995. His brother owned the tractor-trailer truck that was involved in the fatal incident. Both men have been involved in logging most of their lives. Eight workers are employed at the sawmill. The mill has no written guidelines for unloading procedures and no safety program.

The victim had been a full-time miner and began driving the logging truck when he retired from mining several years ago. He had no prior experience in the logging industry. He was married and had been in generally good health. The victim was killed on what was to be his last day of work before full retirement.

INVESTIGATION

The day of the incident was warm and clear. The victim and the logger who owned the semi-trailer truck began work early that morning loading logs onto the truck. Two stacks of logs were hauled on the trailer bed, each bound with two chains which were rusted and in poor condition. Stakes on the sides of the truck were four feet high and the logs were stacked approximately four feet higher than the stakes.

As was usual practice, the victim drove the truck to the sawmill alone; he arrived on the site about 9:00 am. The packed-dirt sawmill yard was fairly level. Drivers are not required to check in upon arriving at the mill, and he began the unloading procedure before any employees came to assist him. He unhooked one chain holding the stack of logs closest to the front of the truck. As he began to unhook the second chain, the stack of logs shifted and a link broke in the remaining chain. As a result, three logs rolled off the truck. Two logs knocked him to the ground and a third rolled over him. Although the incident was unwitnessed, an employee of the mill was working in the yard at the time and heard an unusual sound; he looked over and saw the victim lying on the ground beside the truck. Immediately, 911 was called and EMS workers arrived on the site within minutes. The coroner was summoned to the scene, and the victim was pronounced dead at 9:45 am.

CAUSE OF DEATH

Cause of death was blunt crushing injuries.

RECOMMENDATIONS/DISCUSSION

Recommendation #1: The height of the stack of logs should not exceed the height of the standards on the truck. (APA Safety Alert 93-S-46)

Discussion: In this case, the height of the stack of logs was approximately twice as high as the standards on the trailer. Increasing the height of the standards or lowering the height of the stack would reduce the risk of a log rolling off the truck unexpectedly.

Recommendation #2: Routine safety inspections should be made to ensure that equipment is in proper condition.

Discussion: Routinely checking the equipment can alert workers to potential hazards and thus reduce the risk of injury. Binders used to secure logs on the truck should be well-maintained and replaced when signs of wear or age appear. In this case, replacing the rusty chains could possibly have prevented this fatal incident.

Recommendation #3: Written policies should be in place regarding unloading procedures at the mill and the policies should be enforced by mill owners.

Discussion: Written guidelines for unloading procedures at the mill would help ensure that the logs are unloaded properly, providing a safe work environment for loggers, drivers, and the employees of the mill.

Recommendation #4: Loggers and log-truck drivers should attend the Master Logger Program.

Discussion: Loggers should be aware of proper procedures and safety practices to ensure a safe work environment. For information about the Master Logger Program, contact Jeff Stringer at the University of Kentucky Department of Forestry (606/257-5994).

Recommendation #5: Lawmakers should consider initiating regulations to limit the height of log stacks on vehicles traveling on public roadways.

Discussion: Loggers operating as independent contractors usually are not subject to Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) regulations. In an effort to decrease the risk of injury during unloading, log-stack height could be regulated by transportation laws. Because transportation of logs to mills takes place via public roadways, other travellers are at risk due to shifting of the logs and potential failure of the binders. Enforcement based in transportation laws rather than occupational safety regulations may reduce the risk of fatalities occurring at sawmills and reduce the hazard to others on the road.

REFERENCES

American Pulpwood Association, Inc. (APA). Safety Alert 93-S-46. December 1993.