

Public Health
KY FACE #95KY05001
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SUBJECT: Farmer Run Over After Falling From Tractor

SUMMARY

A 54-year-old male farmer was killed in a tractor runover incident. The victim was on his way to his tobacco field when he lost control of his tractor. After it left the road, he fell and was run over by the right rear tire and possibly the edge of the attached plow. The three-year-old tractor was equipped with a seatbelt, but it was not fastened. The victim was pronounced dead at the scene by the county coroner. In order to prevent similar incidents, the KY FACE investigator concluded that:

- Tractor operators should always wear seatbelts;
- Tractor operators should pay close attention to symptoms of illness, and should seek medical attention promptly.

INTRODUCTION

On 4 June 1995, KY FACE was notified of the death on 2 June 1995 of a farmer.

An investigation was immediately initiated. The case was discussed by telephone with the county coroner, and on 23 June 1995, a KY FACE investigator traveled to the scene to continue the investigation. There were no eyewitnesses to this incident. The coroner, a lifetime friend of the victim, was interviewed, as well as the farm equipment dealer from whom the tractor had been purchased. Copies of the medical examiner's report and the coroner's report, and photographs of the scene, were obtained and reviewed.

INVESTIGATION

The victim had been a lifetime farmer. He was born and raised on a farm, and farming had been his primary occupation for all of his adult life. For about twenty years he had supplemented his farm income with a snack food delivery route three days per week, but had given this up almost two years prior to this incident. Tobacco was the mainstay on his 35-acre farm, but he also raised a little corn and had a few cows. He had always enjoyed good health and was taking no medications. Recently his doctor had informed him that his cholesterol level was high, and that he should modify his diet, but no medication was prescribed. For several days he had complained to his wife of indigestion, and said that he was going to see a doctor, but he had not yet

done so. On the day of the incident he attached a bucket of tobacco plants to his tractor and set out for the tobacco field at about 10:00 am.

The 1992 model diesel tractor with spread front wheels was a Ford Model 3930, 4-wheel drive. It had been purchased new by the victim three years earlier. A drum-type fertilizer container was attached to the front end of the tractor, and a tiller plow was attached to the rear. The tractor was equipped with a Roll Over Protective Structure (ROPS), a seatbelt, and a slow-moving vehicle emblem (SMV). It was in excellent condition.

Shortly after the victim left home at approximately 10:00 am to go to his tobacco field, it began to rain. His wife assumed that he would return home immediately, and became concerned when he did not. She waited until the thunderstorm passed before going out to look for him. She found his cap in the road at the top of a hill; the victim was lying in a grassy area at the bottom of the hill, about a half-mile from their home. She returned to the house to call for an ambulance at 12:30 pm. When emergency medical personnel arrived they found no pulse or respiration, and called the dispatcher to send the coroner, who pronounced the victim dead at the scene at 1:45 pm.

CAUSE OF DEATH

An autopsy was performed on the decedent, which revealed acute myocardial insufficiency and acute and chronic myocardial ischemia, associated with blunt abdominal and chest trauma. The medical examiner reported to the coroner that the heart problem would not have been sufficient to cause death, but probably caused the victim to collapse and fall from his tractor. He was then run over by the right rear wheel of the tractor, which was the cause of death.

RECOMMENDATIONS/DISCUSSION

Recommendation #1: Tractor operators should always use their seatbelts or other operator restraint systems.

Discussion: In this case, the victim probably would not have fallen from the tractor if he had been wearing his seatbelt. Since the opinion of the medical examiner was that he would have recovered from the heart problem, wearing the seatbelt probably would have saved his life.

Recommendation #2: Tractor operators should pay close attention to symptoms of illness, and should seek medical attention promptly.

Discussion: During the week prior to this incident, the victim had been complaining to his wife of indigestion, which sometimes is a symptom of a heart problem. Had he gone to his doctor for an examination he might have received a diagnosis and medication which would have prevented his collapse and fall from the tractor.