

Public Health
KY FACE #KY9501101
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SUBJECT: Farmer Killed When Run Over by Tractor in Barn

SUMMARY

A 62-year-old male farmer was killed inside his barn on a Saturday afternoon after starting his tractor from a standing position. The victim was demonstrating recent repairs to the tractor for his brother-in-law; a new battery and starter had been installed. Standing beside the tractor, the victim reached for the ignition switch to turn the tractor on. The tractor was in gear; when he turned the key the tractor lurched forward, running over the victim, who died moments later. The KY FACE investigators concluded that, to prevent similar occurrences, farmers and other tractor operators should:

- Never attempt to start a tractor unless seated in the driver's seat.

Additionally, 911 emergency calling service should be initiated countywide.

INTRODUCTION

On March 15, 1995, KY FACE was notified by a deputy coroner of the March 11, 1995, death of a farmer. An investigation was immediately initiated, although the site visit was postponed upon the advice of the deputy coroner. On Thursday, April 13, 1995, two KY FACE investigators traveled to the scene to continue the investigation. Interviews were conducted with the deputy coroner, the victim's widow, emergency medical personnel, and the eyewitness. In addition, the investigators met with the owner/editor of a local newspaper and a county agricultural extension agent. Photographs of the scene and the tractor were made. The case was discussed with the sheriff by telephone. Copies of the coroner's and the sheriff's reports, as well as the death certificate, were obtained.

INVESTIGATION

On Saturday, March 11, 1995, a warm, sunny day, the victim's brother- and sister-in-law were visiting the victim and his wife for a birthday celebration. After going for a drive, the group returned to the farm. The victim and his brother-in-law walked approximately 50 yards to the livestock/machinery barn to look at a calf.

The victim was a 62-year-old male, in fair health. He had lived in this county all his life, and had been married and lived on this 100+ acre farm since 1955. Farming had been his sole occupation. Currently raising grade cattle and hay, he had in recent years leased out his tobacco base. He had owned the Allis-Chalmers tricycle tractor involved in the incident for over 20 years. Although he had purchased a late-model Long tractor five years ago, he still preferred to use the older tractor for plowing, discing, and some other difficult tasks.

The Allis-Chalmers D-15 45-horsepower tractor was in fair condition for its age. It was manufactured prior to 1968. Its weight was estimated at 4270 pounds. Gasoline was noted to be dripping slowly from the gas filter. The seat had been modified. Brakes and clutch were in good working order. It was not equipped with a rollover protective structure (ROPS), operator restraint system, or a slow-moving vehicle (SMV) emblem. This was a drop-bull gear type tractor. It was not equipped with a safety switch; thus it would start whether in gear or not, whether clutch depressed or not, and whether anyone was sitting on the seat or not. It did not have a pto guard.

At approximately 3:30 pm, the victim and his brother-in-law were in the barn looking at a newborn bull calf. The victim decided to demonstrate the newly installed starter on his old tractor. Both the victim and the brother-in-law were standing on the left side of the tractor, the brother-in-law (the witness) being a few feet behind the victim. The victim reached over with his right hand and turned the key, not realizing the tractor was in gear. It lurched forward, running over him and continuing forward approximately 10 feet inside the barn. The left rear tire ran over the victim's shoulder, neck and skull. The tractor was stopped when it ran into the bale spear on the back of the Long tractor, puncturing its radiator. The victim lay behind the Allis-Chalmers tractor, supine, on the hard-packed dirt floor of the barn. The witness ran the 50 yards to the house to communicate what had happened, and then returned to the barn. A call was placed to the emergency medical service (EMS) at 3:42 pm; they were dispatched immediately and arrived at the scene at 3:59 pm. EMS personnel checked for pulse and respiration and ran an electrocardiogram (EKG), all of which were negative. A call was placed to the deputy coroner, who came to the scene and pronounced the victim dead.

CAUSE OF DEATH

The coroner listed the cause of death as a broken neck. No autopsy was performed.

RECOMMENDATIONS/DISCUSSION

Recommendation #1: Tractors should never be started without the operator being on the seat.

Discussion #1: In this case the operator never mounted the tractor. Had he been in the driver's seat this tragedy would have been averted. (Tractors manufactured since the late 1970s are equipped with various safety devices to prevent this type of operator action. For example, these newer tractors cannot be started unless someone is sitting on the driver's seat, the clutch is depressed, and/or the tractor is in a particular starting gear.)

Additionally, owner/operators should be offered safety courses and materials to identify hazards, evaluate risks, and develop safe operating procedures. The information should be easily accessible to operators. This is an avenue by which county extension agents can be effective in intervention and prevention.

The emergency medical service was effectively notified and arrived at the scene quickly in this case. However, 911 telephone service should be implemented countywide because it is universally recognized by the public as the number to call in the event of an emergency.