

MO FACE INVESTIGATION #94MO032

SUBJECT:

Intoxicated Refuse Collector Falls Off Of And Is Backed Over By Refuse Truck

SUMMARY:

A 32-year-old intoxicated refuse collector died after falling from the rear of a refuse truck and being backed over on a residential street. The victim and co-worker (driver) were on a routine collection route at the time of the incident. The workers had backed the truck apporoxamately 65-feet on dead-end street, which had no turn around, when the incident occurred.

The MO FACE Investigator concluded that in order to prevent a similar occurrence employers should:

- develop, implement and enforce a comprehensive safety program that includes, but is not limited to, training in hazard recognition and avoidance

INTRODUCTION:

On January 24, 1994, a 32-year-old intoxicated refuse collector died after falling off and being backed over by a refuse truck. The employer is a private refuse collection and hauling company that has been in business for 18 years. At the time of the incident, the employer had 16 employees of which six had the same occupation or job title as the victim. The victim had been employed by this employer in the past, but had been dismissed after the employer found the victim intoxicated on the job. The victim was re-hired by the employer after proving he was "on the wagon," and agreed to a statement saying he was an alcoholic and was in a treatment program. He had been employed for 20 days before this incident. The company has a safety program, safety officer, and a written safety plan. They routinely have safety meetings and promote job safety with a incentive program.

The MO FACE Investigator was notified of the incident on January 25,

1994, and conducted an investigation. Records obtained for use in this investigation include the death certificate and the medical examiner's report.

INVESTIGATION:

The employer in this incident routinely collects curbside refuse in and around a major metropolitan city suburb and serves approximately 8500 customers. The usual workday starts between 5:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m. The workers are assigned to their trucks and given the route assignments. The workers are out in the trucks all day and usually take a 30 minute lunch.

On the day of the incident all workers reported as usual including the victim. They were given their assignments and were dismissed. The victim was usually a very quiet man and mostly kept to himself, though on the day of the incident the victim seemed very talkative and upbeat. None of the workers smelled alcohol on the victim or suspected him of being intoxicated.

At 11:15 a.m. the driver of the refuse truck proceeded to back up a dead end street, because there was no place to turn the truck around. He had only backed approximately 65-feet when he glanced to right hand mirror and then felt a slight bump under the rear of the truck. The driver got out of the truck to investigate and found the victim under the truck with the tandem wheels of the truck behind the victim. The driver then radioed in the emergency on the truck's two-way radio, and the dispatcher at the company called 911, giving the location of the incident site. The company office manager left the office and drove directly to the scene. Emergency personnel arrived at the scene and transported the victim to a local trauma center where he was pronounced deceased.

The MO FACE Investigator originally investigated this incident as a fall from a moving vehicle. The toxicity tests done on the victim revealed he had a very high level of alcohol in his blood, and the medical examiner listed acute alcohol intoxication as a contributing cause of death. The truck on which the victim was riding was in good repair, and the steps and handhold were of a recommended style. The driver was operating the truck in a safe and caution manner. There is no indication of why the victim fell from the truck, other than his extreme intoxicated state.

CAUSE OF DEATH:

The death certificate lists the immediate cause of death as blunt chest and abdominal trauma. Other significant conditions contributing to death, but not resulting in the underlying immediate cause of death, is acute ethanol intoxication.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND DISCUSSION:

RECOMMENDATION: **Employers should develop, implement and enforce a comprehensive safety program that includes, but is not limited to, training in hazard recognition.**

DISCUSSION: Employers should emphasize the safety of their employees by developing, implementing, and enforcing a comprehensive safety program. The safety program should include, but not be limited to, training workers in recognition and avoidance workplace hazards.

In this incident the intoxication of the employee went unnoticed. The victim did not smell of alcohol that morning and did not act intoxicated. The only difference the other workers noticed was he was more talkative than normal. The driver of the truck was unaware of the victims state and did not observe the victim drinking while on the job. Employers and co-workers should always be observant of subtle differences in workers that can indicate a person is not fit for work.

The Missouri Department of Health, in co-operation with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (**NIOSH**), is conducting a research project on work-related fatalities in Missouri. The goal of this project, known as the Missouri Occupational Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (**MO FACE**), is to show a measurable reduction in traumatic occupational fatalities in the State of Missouri. This goal will be met by identifying causal and risk factors that contribute to work-related fatalities. Identifying these factors will enable more effective intervention strategies to be developed and implemented by employers and employees. This project does not determine fault or legal liability associated with a fatal incident or with current regulations. All **MO FACE** data will be reported to **NIOSH** for trend analysis on a national basis. This will help **NIOSH** provide employers with effective recommendations for injury prevention. All personal/company identifiers are removed from all reports sent to **NIOSH** to protect the confidentiality of those who voluntarily participate with the program.

SIGNATURES:

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DISSEMINATION LIST

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Alaska State Department of Health and Social Services	AK FACE Program
California State Public Health Foundation	CA FACE Program
Colorado State Department of Health	CO FACE Program
Georgia State Department of Health	GA FACE Program
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