

Bulldozer Owner / Operator Dies When Thrown Off Bulldozer Track

Incident Number: 03KY049
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Summary

On June 19, 2003, a 58-year-old bulldozer owner/operator (decedent) died when he was thrown off the track of his bulldozer. The bulldozer owner/operator and a laborer were having difficulty starting the bulldozer. Together, the two men had tried several different methods to start the bulldozer including: spraying ether into the air chamber, having the battery recharged, replacing the battery cables with new ones and tightening wires to the starter. They worked from the left side track of the bulldozer. The laborer sat towards the front of the track tightening the wires to the starter while the owner stood on the track to the right of the laborer three to four feet away. As the laborer tightened the main lead wire to the starter, the owner stood on the track, leaned into the cab of the bulldozer and pushed the start button. The two men did not realize the dozer was in reverse gear. When the owner pushed the button, the bulldozer jumped backward, throwing the laborer off the side of the bulldozer track and throwing the owner underneath the track. The owner died at the scene from massive injuries to his pelvis and chest. To prevent future occurrences of similar incidents, the following recommendations have been made:

Recommendation No. 1: Always start bulldozers and other heavy equipment from the cab with the seatbelt fastened.

Recommendation No. 2: Self-employed company owners should take continuing education courses including equipment maintenance and troubleshooting techniques.

Recommendation No. 3: Do not sit or stand on parts of bulldozers or other heavy equipment not intended for human occupancy.

Recommendations & Discussions

Recommendation No. 1: Always operate bulldozer from the cab with seatbelt fastened. When starting a bulldozer or other heavy equipment, the operator should follow safety precautions. Equipment should only be started with the operator sitting in the operator's seat with the seatbelt fastened (1). This will help eliminate the possibility of the machine moving unexpectedly and becoming out-of-control. The operator should ensure the machine is in neutral with the brake set and all persons clear before starting the engine.

Recommendation No. 2: Self-employed company owners should take continuing education courses including those addressing equipment maintenance and troubleshooting techniques. Company owners of heavy equipment should keep themselves up-to-date on the latest updates involving the equipment they own, operate and maintain. New safety techniques and tools emerge and company owners and their employees should remain up-to-date on these techniques.

Recommendation No. 3: Do not stand or sit on sections of a bulldozer not intended for human occupancy. The tracks of the bulldozer are meant to move the machine and not meant for personal occupancy. Heavy equipment is similar to farm tractors in several aspects. Both are dangerous when not operated properly and in a conscientious manner. Each has components not intended for human occupancy and those components are tempting to be used improperly. Bulldozer operators should only start the bulldozer when sitting in the operator's seat with the seatbelt fastened. However, there are occasions when maintenance issues dictate workers to access machine components from the tracks. When this is the case, workers should ensure the machine is turned off and in neutral. The brake should be set and the tracks should be chocked.