

Dairy Laborer Dies when Loader Falls into Manure Pit

Industry: Dairy

Task: Operating loader to feed cows

Occupation: Dairy laborer

Type of Incident: Manure pit drowning





FATALITY NARRATIVE

In February 2015, a 27-year-old dairy laborer operating a loader drowned when the loader fell into a manure pit.

The victim was an experienced dairy worker who previously had operated loaders at other farms. He had been working for 6 months at his employer's dairy farm. His job duties included operating a loader to bring feed to cows in a pen and helping with milking. He had been trained by his supervisor how to operate the loader.

He worked the night shift from 9 p.m. to 6 a.m. Prior to the incident he was working alone operating the loader to push feed to the penned cows. When he finished his task, he drove the loader along a dirt road on the employer's property that would take him to the milking area, where he would spend the rest of his shift. On the way, he turned off the road away from his destination and travelled across a field back toward the cow pen. It is unknown why he went toward the pen.

In the field between the road and the pen, there was an unfenced, unmarked ground level manure pit. This manure pit was 50 feet long by 15 feet wide and 4-to 6-feet deep. As he was driving in a 15-foot-wide area between the pit and fence, the loader tipped over into the pit. It landed on its side, submerging the operator's cab. The victim drowned. The coroner reported to the media that he had methamphetamine in his system.



Manure pit with the loader on its side partially submerged. The victim was driving along the dirt road in the upper right of the photo in the direction of the arrow when he left the road and drove across the field toward the cow pen.



Incident scene showing the manure pit with the loader. The victim was driving the loader along the cow pen fence line when it fell into the pit.



Loader partially submerged in manure pit.

FATALITY NARRATIVE



Loader after it was retrieved from the manure pit.



FATALITY NARRATIVE

Requirements

- Employers must furnish to each employee a place of employment free from recognized controllable hazards likely to cause serious injury or death.

See [WAC 296-307-045\(1\)](#)

- Address manure storage dangers and safety in your written accident prevention program.

See [WAC 296-307-030](#)



FATALITY NARRATIVE

Recommendations

- To prevent drowning of workers, uncovered ground level earthen manure storage lagoons, ponds, and pits should be surrounded by fencing, railings, or other protective barriers and warning signs posted to prevent accidental entry of farm vehicles, equipment, and workers.
- Operators who are under the influence of drugs or alcohol should not operate equipment or motor vehicles, as their ability to respond appropriately to hazardous conditions can be impaired.

FATALITY NARRATIVE



Protective barriers of concrete ecology blocks installed by the employer around the manure pit after the incident.

FATALITY NARRATIVE



Signage on concrete ecology block barrier warning employees not to enter the manure pit located behind it.

FATALITY NARRATIVE



Manure storage area with fencing and signage.



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Resources

For information about practices to minimize the hazards of manure storage:

See consensus standard [Manure Storage Safety ASAE EP470.1 OCT2011](#) published by the American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers.



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This bulletin was developed to alert employers and employees of a tragic loss of life of a worker in Washington State and is based on preliminary data ONLY and does not represent final determinations regarding the nature of the incident or conclusions regarding the cause of the fatality.

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