

FATAL ALERT

June 9, 2008

A laborer/fencer working setting up fence line on railroad right-of-way property was fatally injured while operating a small rubber tracked earth moving machine across a small stream while being towed by a larger earth moving machine (CAT, D5). The injury occurred when the towing device, a combination of a 25' long 4" nylon tow strap and a connecting 15' fiber rope/chained ended tow rope failed and resulted in the fatal injury. The worker was performing a stream crossing, across a 4'-5' deep body of water and rigged the towing device in an attempt to ensure the safe crossing of the machinery. The 15' fiber rope/chain ended device failed under the strain, after the front blade of the small earth mover became lodged in the approaching stream bank as the earth moving equipment attempted to climb grade out of the stream bed. The failure on the fiber rope was in the rope portion of the tow device, not the metal chain ends that were attached to the tow rope at both ends. The deceased had been working that day installing fence pole and fence line adjacent to the railroad tracks. The deceased was not working alone and at the time of the accident and three (3) other employees were present. It appears that the nylon strap and remaining portion of the tow rope, after failure, traveled back toward the deceased seated in the operator's seat of the small earth mover striking the deceased in the upper forehead area. Due to the amount of force, the deceased was instantly killed from massive head trauma and remained in the operator's seat after the accident.

The deceased was an experienced operator of construction equipment and had many years in the fencing/construction business.

Significant Factors:

Deceased was working in small rubber tracked earth mover-type construction vehicle and they had attached a towing device to the mounting structure that secures the front blade of the equipment.

The towing device consisted of a 25' long 4" nylon tow strap and a 15' long fiber rope/chain ended tow rope. The 15' tow rope was attached to the ripper of the larger earth mover (CAT D5) and the nylon strap was attached to the blade attachment area of the smaller rubber tracked earth mover.

The strain placed on the tow rope proved to be too much of a load for the tow rope, which failed, traveling back in-line to the deceased, seated in the smaller earth mover.

The investigation was able to determine that the deceased exposed to massive head trauma and was instantly killed from the injury.

Recommendations:

- Brief all employees on the facts and circumstances of this fatal mishap.
- Brief/retrain all employees on the danger of working around construction equipment, towing devices, and rigging systems that can injure employees.
- Recommend that all employees recognize and work in safe locations when working around construction equipment, towing devices, and rigging systems that are identified as potential high risk /areas/situations.
- Recommend that all employees working around construction equipment be trained in hazard recognition and safe working locations, rigging procedures, and alternative measures/procedures.