

FATAL ALERT

June 18, 2009

On June 18, 2009, a grounds keeper working for a golf course/resort company was fatality injured while working on a large tractor-style lawn mower. The accident occurred when the grounds keeper started the diesel powered tractor from a position located beside the tractor while it was parked in the maintenance shop. The accident was witnessed by the shop mechanic, who was in the process of repairing the tractor. The shop-mechanic stated that he was standing several yards away from the tractor when the accident occurred. The shop-mechanic stated that he was just getting ready to perform some repair work on the tractor when the victim/operator of the equipment reached over and pushed the starter button while standing next to the piece of equipment. The original key ignition system had been replaced by a starter button device by the victim. The built-in safety system relating to the safety switch on the clutch installed by the manufacturer had been by-passed by the victim about 9 years ago due to the key ignition switch not working. The shop-mechanic stated the tractor's shifter was positioned in reverse gear when the victim pushed the starter button. The mower immediately started and began to move backwards, which resulted in the dual tires running over the victim. The shop-mechanic stated the victim fell over from the weight of the left side front dual tires as they ran over him. The tractor proceeded in reverse veering into the wall of the shop. The shop-mechanic stated that he immediately went over to the victim's location to provide assistance and then called for help.

It was determined in the course of the investigation that the safety switch located on the clutch pedal was in disrepair and had been electrically altered/by-passed.

The victim was an experienced lawn mower/grounds keeper at a golf course/resort and had many years in the profession.

Significant Factors:

The victim was working as a seasonal employee of the grounds keeping staff for a golf course/resort company.

The victim had changed the key ignition system to just a starter button, by-passing the manufacturers safety features.

It is unknown why the victim had reached over and started the tractor mower.

The victim was unable to get clear of the moving tractor mower, fell and was run over, sustaining injuries to the legs, pelvic area, abdomen, chest and right shoulder from the weight of the 10,000 pound GVW tractor mower.

The victim was exposed to massive internal and skeletal trauma and within hours after the injury, died as a result.

Recommendations:

- Brief all employees on the facts and circumstances of this fatal mishap.
- Brief/retrain all employees on the dangers of working with and around tractor lawn mowers, and the dangers of working with equipment that has been modified without the prior written approval of the manufacturer.
- Train/retrain all employees to recognize and avoid unsafe work conditions when working with powered equipment/tractor mowers.
- Train employees to follow the instructions stated in the owner's manual on start-up procedures and when operating any onsite equipment.