

FATAL ALERT

August 14, 2007

On Tuesday, August 14, 2007, a weed spraying crew, consisting of the supervisor and a seasonal employee, were spraying for weeds along an irrigation ditch from an all-terrain vehicle (ATV). They were traveling northbound on an unmaintained road along the west side of a drainage ditch. The ditch was approximately 6-feet deep and 25-feet wide. There was approximately 6-inches of water in the bottom of the ditch, which was approximately 3-feet wide, with grass growing in it.

The crew had completed their task on the west bank and needed to cross the ditch. They found a livestock crossing with a wide path down the west side. The path was approximately 6-feet wide and the grade of slope was approximately 30%.

The supervisor was driving/operating the ATV and the crew member was riding on the front rack. The ATV had been modified by the addition of a chemical spray tank. After descending the west bank, the supervisor realized the grade of slope up the east bank, at approximately 45%, was too steep to attempt safely. He decided to back the ATV up the west bank and communicated this to the employee.

He put the ATV in reverse and they started to back up the path. There was a ledge on the right side (downhill side) with an approximately 12-18 inch drop. The right tires went over the ledge causing the ATV to roll completely over into the ditch.

The employee managed to jump clear of the ATV but the supervisor was pinned under the ATV, face down in the water in the ditch. The employee was unable to move the ATV and it was approximately 15-20 minutes before she could get enough help to the site to remove the ATV. The ATV operator drowned.

Significant Factors

- Employer had not required ATV operator to review owners/operators manual or safety DVD prior to operating equipment
- ATV had been modified by the addition of the chemical spray tank. When full, it exceeded the ATV manufacturer's rated load capacity
- The grade of slope (on both sides) exceeded the ATV manufacturer's recommendations for safe terrain
- Operator allowed a passenger to ride on the front rack of the ATV

Recommendations

- All employees should be briefed on the facts and circumstances of this fatal accident
- Employer needs to require training on the safe operation of the ATV to any employee authorized to operate it
- Employer needs to obtain approval from the vehicle manufacturer prior to modifying the vehicle and exceeding recommended load capacities
- Employer needs to provide and ensure employees working from the ATV wear the manufacturer's recommended safe riding equipment