

Don't get burned

Take extra precautions when hauling hot asphalt

The accident: A dump truck driver stopped along the highway to assist another dump truck driver, who was having brake problems. As the first driver examined the disabled truck from underneath, the tailgate opened unexpectedly, covering him in hot asphalt. The driver of the second truck suffered severe burns on his hands and arms while attempting to rescue the first driver, who later died from thermal injuries.

The bottom line: A post-accident investigation determined the truck involved was an older model purchased used, which had then been modified to make the tailgate section flat instead of lipped. The air line connection for the brake line at the rear of the truck had loosened and caused a loss of air pressure in the braking system, which also shared an air tank with the tailgate system. When the air released from the cylinder, the automatic trip handle released. The air tailgate latch had asphalt buildup, preventing it from locking properly and allowing the tailgate to open. The investigation further determined there was no tailgate chain backup system in place to secure the tailgate in the event the trip handle failed.



Illustration by Don Lomax

You can't be too cautious

The driver of the second truck was carrying approximately two tons of 400-degree asphalt. When carrying hot asphalt, take extra precautions to avoid coming into contact with the material.

Keep it clean. When the surfactant that helps prevent sticking is sprayed onto the surface of the dump truck bed, make sure it is sprayed anywhere buildup can occur, such as the trip handles. After loading the asphalt, stop and make sure the tailgate is completely closed and latched prior to continuing.

Use a backup. In this accident the

truck had no chains on the tailgate secured to serve as a backup precaution before unloading. Secure the tailgate to the sides of the dump truck with chains prior to getting on the road.

Recognize and avoid dangerous situations. The driver who stopped to help was unfamiliar with the second truck, and did not recognize the danger presented by the unsecured tailgate, and knew nothing about either the modifications to the truck or the failure in the air line connection. With so little information available, he should have never crawled under the truck. **EW**

Information for this Safety Watch is from an accident report, the Center for Disease Control's NIOSH Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation program and the Kentucky State FACE program. It is meant for general information only.

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