

One jump, one slip and a worker goes under the paving machine

Paving machines move so slowly, you wouldn't think you could get run over by one. But, you'd be wrong.

In the summer of 1996, a nine-man crew was hard at work with an asphalt road-widening machine on an Iowa state highway. A member of the crew, who had only been on the job four days, was tasked with adjusting the machine's side-mounted spreader arm by walking alongside and to the rear of the paver.

In this particular application, the paver lays down two layers of asphalt. The first layer is paved with the machine going forward. Then, the operator reverses the machine, backs it up to the starting point, and puts down the second layer while the first is still hot.

After the paver had made a long, forward pass, the new crewmember decided he could hitch a ride on the machine as it was backing up for the second pass. But when the new crewmember jumped up on the machine, his foot slipped. He fell off the machine and was run over by the right front tire. Accident investigators speculate that fresh, wet asphalt on the bottom of his boots may have caused him to slip. The machine operator had told the new crewmember not to ride on the side of the machine, but to climb on top if he wanted a ride. Also, coworkers indicated that the victim might have been fatigued or suffering from heat stress.

The paver weighed 40 tons and amputated the victim's left leg and crushed his pelvis with substantial damage to the thigh and groin areas. The man was airlifted to a regional



Illustration by Don Lomax

hospital. Significant internal bleeding led to major medical complications and the 35-year-old victim died in the hospital nine days later.

The paving company had been in business for 50 years and employed up to 450 people in peak season. According to OSHA, the safety program for this company was comprehensive with weekly, job-specific safety talks, onsite safety meetings prior to the start of any new job, and written procedures for all tasks -- including a policy prohibiting workers from riding on machines not designed for passengers.

How this accident could have been prevented

- Operators or drivers of equipment should be aware of the crewmembers around them at all times.
- Crewmembers should never ride on machines not designed for passenger transport.
- Employees who show signs of fatigue should either be allowed to

rest or dismissed from the jobsite. Schedule rest periods and water breaks on hot days. Train all workers to recognize the symptoms of heat exhaustion and fatigue.

- When working with new employees, it is imperative that you inform them of all company safety rules before they go into the field. Since the victim in this instance was new to the job, it is possible that he didn't know about the company's written policy banning crews from riding on the machines. It's also a good idea to assign a more experienced crewmember to work alongside a new employee. The more experienced hand can show him the ropes and fill in the gaps in the new employee's safety knowledge.

- Remind your employees to move slowly and cautiously around heavy equipment, and to avoid sudden movements or direction changes without first looking around.

For more information: www.cdc.gov/niosh/face/stateface/mi/01mi001.html.



Date of safety talk: _____ Leader: _____
 Attending: _____