Deadly driveshaft
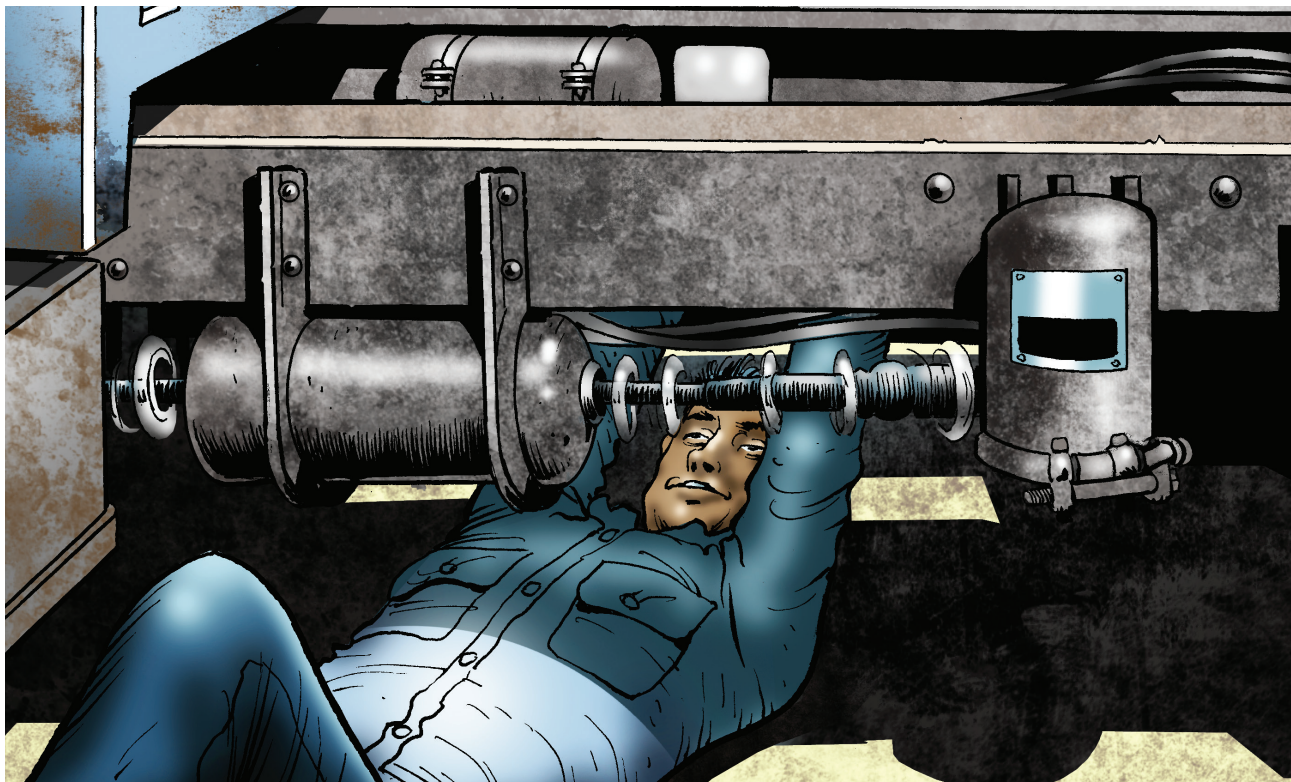

Illustration by Don Lomax

Power take-off devices on trucks do a great many things, but like any rotating mechanical device, they need to be respected.

Case in point: In the fall of 2013, a dump truck driver pulled into a jobsite with the intent of dropping off a load of gravel. But, when he attempted to raise the dump box, nothing happened. The driver got out of the cab, and with the truck still running, lifted up the hood to inspect the engine bay.

Having found no solution to the problem in the engine area, the driver then laid down on the ground and crawled under the truck to see what the problem was. While the driver was prone under the truck, his shirt caught in the unshielded PTO driveshaft, which was still spinning, slamming his neck and head up against the driveline and choking him to death.

A short time later, the subcontractor he worked for noticed that the truck was not running and the driver was lying motionless under the truck. When the subcontractor saw the driver's injuries, he called 911. Emergency responders cut the driver's clothing free from the driveshaft and pulled him from under the truck. He was pronounced dead on arrival; cause of death: asphyxiation.

How this could have been prevented

- Truck drivers should be trained on the dangers associated with PTOs and driveshafts.
- Prior to any work process, drivers and other personnel should ensure that the PTO is disengaged and the truck engine is shut off.
- Dump truck drivers should perform daily, pre-trip inspections, including raising and lowering the dump box.
- Never wear loose clothing when working around driveshafts or other rotating mechanical components.
- If not so equipped from the factory, trucks with exposed PTOs should be retrofitted with shields, and gearboxes should be relocated to more accessible locations.
- Always consult with a competent mechanic when attempting to investigate or fix mechanical problems.

For more information, check out: www.cdc.gov/niosh/face/pdfs/13MI136.pdf

Date of safety talk:_____ Leader:_____

Attending:_____