

Alone, stoned...and dead

It should have been an easy day. A 22-year-old surveyor was tasked with general maintenance activities, changing batteries on a series of fixed equipment locations spread over a large Indian reservation.

It was New Year's Day and only a few employees were at work. The surveyor acquired a six-wheel all-terrain vehicle (ATV) at the company shop and headed into the staging area and then into woods to perform his chores. He had worked for the company for five months and operated on ATVs much of that time.

After 45 minutes his supervisor attempted to contact him by radio but got no response. After 30 more minutes the super started a search and headed in the same direction with crew members. The surveyor was found three hours later underneath the overturned ATV with the bar of the ATV storage rack slammed against his neck. The search crew attempted to find a pulse, but to no avail, and he was pronounced dead shortly afterward.

An investigation found that the victim had not followed the assigned path to the station but attempted to drive into a 6-foot-deep, 20-foot-wide washout alongside a steep hill. Investigators concluded he attempted to cross the washout at a steep angle, which caused the ATV to overturn, but noted there were easier and safer paths nearby. They also noted that he had removed his hardhat and replaced it with a ball cap.

A bag of a suspected controlled substance was found on the victim's body, and later blood tests showed traces of methamphetamine, amphetamine and cannabis sufficient to suggest chronic drug use and recent marijuana use.

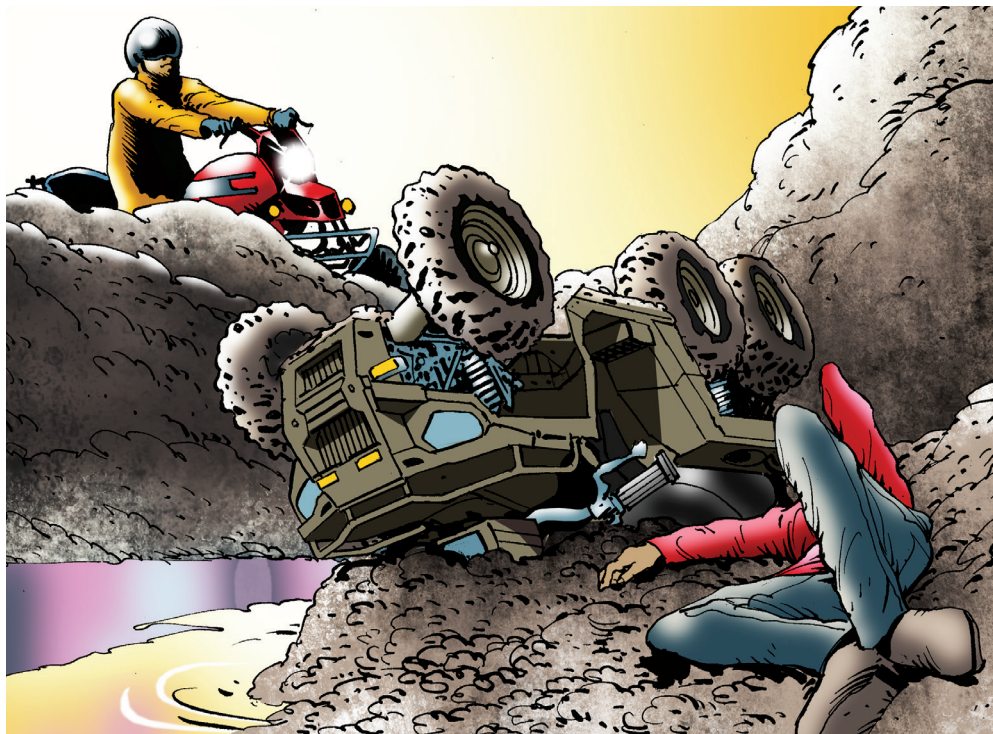


Illustration by Don Lomax

How this accident could have been prevented:

- As the victim was under the influence of drugs, a comprehensive pre-employment drug screening and regular random drug testing might have kept this employee off the payroll.
- Coworkers and supervisors should be trained to look for drug use symptoms on the job and empowered to report violations.
- All workers should be warned about removing personal protective gear including hard hats, and fines instituted for any violations.
- Consider welding or installing roll bars or rollover protective structures on ATVs that traverse steep hills, ravines and challenging terrain.
- On days with few people in the field, consider using the buddy system or more closely monitoring workers who venture alone long distances from the staging area.
- Consider putting GPS-based tracking devices on vehicles or equipment that venture out of sight.

For more information go to: www.cdc.gov/niosh/face/stateface/wy/95wy004.html



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