

Forklift Accident Nearly Results in Fatality

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To help TPA members avoid accidents resulting in injury or damage to property, the Timber Bulletin, in association with Lumbermen's Underwriting Alliance, will publish details of actual incidents and what can be done to avoid such occurrences in the future. By sharing this information, TPA and LUA hope to make our industry as safe as possible.

Background:

This case study compiles information from personal interviews with the owner (Accident Investigation), the employees, and the review of the mobile equipment. This mid-size sawmill location operates a scragg mill, a conventional sawmill, two planing operations, and a two cut-stock plants.

While this loss occurred in the warm months, the weather was somewhat normal for the time of year. This personal injury situation took place within the city limits of a small town.

Operator:

An employee with 15 years experience with the company was an occasional forklift driver when not assigned to his regular duties as a sawyer. The individual had been re-tested four months prior to this incident on OSHA forklift safety.

Accident and/or Injury:

The employee was temporarily assigned to a crew running a specialty product. As product accumulated, the employee would transport the units by forklift to a row of product outside the building.

On one of these trips, the employee got off the forklift to set dunnage for the first unit in a tier of two bundles high. The employee left the forklift running and



The space between the lumber pile and the loaded forklift was the pinch point in this situation.

believed that he set the parking brake and put the gear into neutral, then went between his load and the existing pile. As he got off the forklift, the load remained elevated.

As he stooped down to set the dunnage, the forklift crept forward, pinning the employee between the two loads. Unable to yell for help, the employee began enduring the crushing effect of the forklift moving forward. A second seasoned driver who has a commanding view in his field of vision by sitting 6 ½ feet up from ground level in his 15,000-pound capacity tractor, was coming into this storage area. This second driver noticed the unoccupied forklift but no one in sight. To this second driver's credit, he thought it to be an unusual situation and continued to look around. As he approached the forklift, he saw the driver pinned. He quickly dismounted off his tractor and reversed the forklift that was pinning the injured employee.

While the forklift driver appeared to be only shaken, he was taken to the ER for observation. The exam found a broken rib and a collapsed lung. The employee was released from the ER. The incident

and became a three-day lost time accident rather than a fatality.

Unsafe Act and/or Condition:

Maintenance personnel checked the forklift and found both the handbrake and the neutral gear to be working properly.

The test questions did not cover this specific situation of lowering the load but was included in the new testing.

As a result of this situation, all personnel that regularly or occasionally drives either forklift or tractor went through complete training as an operator. This included a two-hour video and written tests, along with observed testing.

The following suggestions may help prevent problems of this nature while operating front-end loaders and forklifts.

Preventative Measures:

1. Employee front-end loader and forklift safety training needs to include, but not be limited to:
 - a. When a forklift driver gets off his unit, the load must always be lowered to the ground, which minimizes the risk of the forklift moving.
 - b. The driver should shut down

- the unit when getting off the forklift, regardless of the time expected off the unit.
- c. The driver must always ensure the parking brake is set before dismounting.
 - d. All employees must be aware of his or her fellow employees' situation to ensure the safety of others.
2. Lumber and log yard safety work rules need to be enforced.
 3. Refresher training and follow-up must be in place.

Minnesota Tree Farmers Win Regional Award

Robert and Ingrid Sonnenberg, Minnesota's Tree Farmers of the year, have been honored as one of four regional Tree Farmers of the Year by the American Tree Farm System. The Sonnenbergs are now finalists for the national award, to be announced in Burlington, Vermont in July.

The Sonnenbergs own a 21-acre Tree Farm located in New York Mills, Minn. Robert grew up on the Tree Farm he now currently owns and has managed for the past 50 years. In 1996, Sonnenberg sought professional forestry help to manage the less productive forestlands. A Forest Stewardship plan was created and the Sonnenbergs have been managing the land ever since. In 2002, their woodlot was recognized as a certified Tree Farm.

Since 1998, Sonnenberg has planted more than 80,000 trees on 100 acres of his woodlot. Sonnenberg is currently working with the University of Minnesota on hybrid aspen clones. He has restored a 45-acre wetland and with that given numerous geese, ducks and pheasants a new nesting ground. Along with other wildlife efforts the Sonnenbergs oversee all of the work done in their Tree Farm. In addition, Bob serves on the Minnesota Forestry Association Board of Directors.

The American Tree Farm System® is a program of the American Forest Foundation. Tree Farmer of the Year awards recognize outstanding sustainable forest management on family-owned woodlands.



Photo courtesy Kathleen Preece, Better Forests Magazine