

Case 66. 53-year-old male brakeman died when he was crushed between a gate and train trackmobile engine while moving rail cars.

On July 15, 2004, a 53-year-old male brakeman died when he was crushed between a gate and train trackmobile engine while moving rail cars. The shipping yard had two hinged 20-foot long gates constructed of cyclone fencing that were used by the employer to seal off access to their property from a wooded area where three railroad track spurs entered the facility. The gates were to be held open by dropping the gate pin into a cinder block. The ground was higher on the side of the gate involved in this incident so the gate pin was in the gravel instead of the cinder block. The gate weighed approximately 400 pounds. Railcars are moved by a trackmobile, which is similar to a small train engine. The victim and his coworkers had completed 6 or 7 railcar moves using a rented trackmobile; the company's trackmobile unit was being serviced. The rental unit was not equipped with side mirrors as was the company's unit. The victim opened a switch track to allow the trackmobile operator to travel to the railcar to be moved to outside of the gates. It appears that the victim boarded the side of the last railcar to ride it out of the area without being seen or informing his coworkers that he was taking this action. As the trackmobile operator approached the gates it appears that the wind, which was blowing at 28 knots, moved the gate up to the track. The gate movement was unseen by the trackmobile operator and apparently, the victim. The gate struck the trackmobile. The operator applied the brakes but before the trackmobile stopped, the gate became lodged onto the front of the trackmobile and bent the first 12-foot section of the 20-foot long gate so that it was up against the railcars as they traveled past. It is unknown where the victim was positioned, only that he was caught between the gate and the railcar. The trackmobile operator exited the operator's station and saw the victim on the ground between the gate and the side of the rail car. The victim was wearing an orange reflective vest. The victim was pronounced dead on the scene.

MIOSHA did not issue any citations.

MIOSHA issued the following safety recommendations:

1. Provide in-ground securing devices that will securely hold the gates in their fully opened position.
2. Provide, install and properly adjust additional mirrors on the outside of the trackmobile's operator station to allow the operators a clear view of the tracks and railcars that are being towed.
3. Revise current procedures to include additional communications between brakemen and trackmobile operators that includes current positions of the brakemen before the railcars are put into motion so that the trackmobile operators will be able to see the brakemen visually whenever possible before any move is made.