

Case 136. 33-year-old engineer and owner of a metal fabrication company died when the forklift he was charging with a battery charger lurched rearward and ran over him.

A 33-year-old male engineer and owner of a metal fabrication company died when the forklift he was charging with a battery charger lurched rearward and ran over him. The forklift was an International M460 tractor that had been retrofitted to be a forklift. The forklift did not have a good battery and it often needed to be jumped in order to start. The vehicle frame was 12 inches above the ground and the forks where measured were 15 inches above the ground. The battery was externally mounted on the left side of the vehicle and behind the front drive tire. The starter was externally mounted above the battery. The vehicle had a key switch that turned on the electrical supply to the motor and then a button was pushed to start the motor. The decedent was standing in front of the battery, just behind the drive tire. The forklift was in reverse gear. The decedent had connected the battery charger to the battery and/or the starter in an effort to start the vehicle. He then reached over and pushed the starter button. The vehicle attempted to start and lurched rearward. When the vehicle moved it grabbed the decedent's right leg and pulled him and the battery charger under the vehicle. As the decedent was pulled under the vehicle, he and the battery charger became lodged under the forks. Once the battery charger cables were pulled free of the battery, the motor died because it had not accumulated enough energy to fully start the motor and keep it running. When the vehicle stopped the battery charger was across the upper portion of the decedent's back pinning him to the ground. 911 was called and the decedent was taken to a local hospital and did two weeks later from the injuries sustained at the time of the incident.

A company representative, MIOSHA, and the responding police department attempted to reconstruct the incident by performing several tests. When the vehicle was in reverse gear, without depressing the clutch or brake pedal, the vehicle would start or attempt to start in gear. Additionally when attempt was made to start the vehicle, each revolution of the motor caused the vehicle to lurch rearward. Tests were conducted with the key in the on position, the off position and with the key removed. In all tests, the vehicle started and lurched rearward.

No citations were issued by the MIOSHA General Industry Safety and Health Division.