

Case 322. 59-year-old landscaping business owner died when he was crushed between the lift bucket arms connecting cross member and the front frame of a Gehl Model 7800 skid steer loader.

A 59-year-old male landscaping business owner died when he was crushed between the lift bucket arms connecting cross member and the front frame of a Gehl Model 7800 skid steer loader. The decedent and a coworker were in the process of straightening and staking a newly planted 25-30-foot tall spruce tree that had fallen over due to heavy rains and high winds. The ground was muddy. A two-inch nylon ratchet strap was attached to the bucket and to the trunk of the tree, approximately eight feet above the ground. The decedent backed the skid steer and raised the bucket to provide tension on the strap to straighten the tree. After the tree was straight, the decedent exited the skid steer, leaving it in Idle. With his coworker, the decedent pounded two stakes into the ground with guidelines attaching to the tree to the stakes. Additional trees were also noted to have loose guidelines, so the work crew tightened these and then returned to the incident tree. The crew determined additional guidelines were required and the decedent repositioned the skid steer, straightened the tree, and added stakes/guidelines. The skid steer was located on the east side of the tree. The sequence of events is unknown after the tree was re-straightened. The coworker stated to the responding police that the decedent said he was going to move the skid steer so they could loosen and remove the nylon strap. The coworker stated he was positioned west of the tree and could not see the decedent or skid steer. The coworker heard a moan and then investigated. He found the decedent between the cross member and the skid steer frame. The coworker stated that the safety bar was down when he attempted to raise the skid steer bucket. He was unable to raise the bucket. He indicated to the MIOSHA compliance officer that the bucket was located approximately four inches from the ground. The coworker ran to a nearby property and emergency response was called. The decedent was declared dead at the scene. Post fatality, the skid steer was inspected by an outside firm. The skid steer safety bar was functional. The skid steer was equipped with a seat safety switch, but the technician examining the unit could not get the seat to move and subsequently could not test the seat safety switch.

The MIOSHA General Industry Safety and Health Division issued the following Serious citations to the employer at the conclusion of its investigation.

SERIOUS: Tractors, Part 22

- Rule 2243(1): A tractor shall be visually inspected prior to each shift to assure that there are no visible defects which would adversely affect the safe operation of the tractor and to assure that the prescribed safety devices are in place and functional.

The tractor was not visually inspected before use and seat pressure safety switch was determined to be non-functional according to outside inspection conducted by independent firm.

- Rule 2251(3): An operator shall not allow anyone to stand or pass under the elevated portion of any tractor or its attachments.

Employee received fatal injuries while standing underneath raised skid steer bucket and reaching into tractor cab.