

Safety and health alert

13/05 Operator loses control of ride-on mower

Incident

The operator of a ride-on mower was seriously injured after driving onto the edge of an embankment where the machine slid out of control down the steep slope, crashing into a tree near the bottom. The operator's leg was caught between the mower and the tree. The gradient of the embankment exceeded the limits specified by the equipment manufacturer, and the operator, who was inexperienced with the mower and unfamiliar with the location, did not have access to the operator's manual.

Factors to consider

- The gradient of the embankment exceeded the limits specified by the equipment manufacturer.
- The operator was inexperienced on this type of equipment and had not mowed in this location before.
- The operator was not conversant with the machine's limitations or the hazards associated with operating on sloping ground.
- The operator's manual was not available at the worksite.

Recommendations

1. When mowing sloping ground, ride-on mowers should be driven up and down the slope, not across the slope.
2. Plant should always be operated in accordance with manufacturer's recommendations and should never be operated on gradients or conditions that exceed the manufacturer's specified safe limits.
3. Operators should receive sufficient training on safe operation of plant to enable them to operate it safely.
4. Warning signs or decals should be clearly displayed near the operator's position on ride-on mowers specifying the maximum operating gradient.
5. Alternatives such as whipper-snippers should be used where the slope exceeds the operating limits for a ride-on mower.
6. New and young workers should be closely supervised to ensure they are working safely, and corrected if they are placing themselves at risk.
7. Plant operation manuals should be readily available to operators whenever the plant is being operated.
8. Grassed slopes could be replaced with bark or garden beds to eliminate the need for mowing.

Further information

For further information on this summary please contact Inspector Nathan Fry on 9327 8777 or access WorkSafe's web site at www.safetyline.wa.gov.au

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