

Safety and health alert

08/95 Driver killed by runaway diesel truck

Incident

The driver of a nine tonne diesel truck loaded with a number of large, empty storage bins, requested the driver of a crane to move the rear bin forward on the truck tray. The crane driver moved his crane behind the truck and extended the hydraulic boom to push the bin forward. The push from the crane started the truck engine and the truck moved forward under power.

The driver ran from the left side of the truck and around the rear to enter the cab on the right hand side. As he climbed inside, the door hit a mesh container and was forced shut, crushing the driver and inflicting fatal injuries.

Factors

- Diesel engines are compression ignition engines and are stopped by shutting off the fuel supply, rather than turning off the electrical ignition circuit as in petrol engines. A diesel engine left in gear may be started by a slight bump. The vehicle will move off under power, and continue to move while the fuel supply is maintained.
- The vehicle was left in gear with the hand brake in the "off" position. The ratchet locking mechanism of the Bowden cable (which controls the flow of fuel to the engine) was inoperative, causing it to be permanently in the "on" position.
- Two other similar fatalities have occurred in the recent past in Western Australia, where the driver slipped and was run over by a rear wheel while attempting to enter the runaway vehicle.

Recommendations

- Before leaving any diesel vehicle the driver should ensure that the hand brake is applied and operational, and the fuel system has been effectively turned off .
- Correct vehicle preventative maintenance is essential to ensure they are maintained in sound operational condition.

Further Information

Further information can be obtained from the WorkSafe internet site www.worksafe.wa.gov.au, or by contacting customer service on 1300 307 877 or email: safety@docep.wa.gov.au.

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