

Safety and health alert

15/97 Farmer dies jump starting his plant

Incident

A 63 year old farmer died at Donnybrook in July 1997, while attempting to jump start a 1982 International Harvester Light Dozer. It is thought he was standing on the track of the dozer spraying a starting distillate (Aerostart) into the air intake of the engine while attempting to start the engine. When the engine did start, it immediately 'raced', due to the addition of the highly flammable distillate. Unfortunately the gear stick had inadvertently been knocked into gear. This caused the dozer to move forward, dislodging the farmer, who was standing on the caterpillar track. It ran over him and caused fatal injuries.

This death was the ninth in Western Australia, related to equipment starting in gear or accidentally knocked into gear since 1 July 1988. This represents 4% of all work related deaths in Western Australia in the past nine years.

Of these nine deaths, five occurred on farms, representing 9.5% of all deaths in the Agricultural Sector.

Factors

1. The battery of the light dozer was flat. Jumper leads were connected to another vehicle. Because the battery of the dozer was located under the operator's seat, it was necessary to have the seat in a forward position and this appears to have pushed the gear stick into the engaged position.
2. The motor of the light dozer was in poor mechanical condition and was difficult to start, prompting the operator to use a starting distillate.
3. Starting distillate has the potential to cause an engine to 'race'. This was the second death in 1997 in which a starter distillate was identified as a major contributing causal factor.
4. There was no guard or cover over the top of the caterpillar tracks, a typical arrangement for this type of plant, therefore to access the motor or drivers position, it was necessary to stand on top of the tracks.

Recommendations

1. Plant and equipment should receive regular routine maintenance in accordance with the manufacturer's manual or the dealer's recommendations.
2. Jump starting of any plant should be avoided. It is always safer to recharge the battery in the workshop.
3. Older types of plant are likely to have fewer safety features. Operators of old plant must place increased importance on:
 - o Spotting the hazard,
 - o Assessing the risk and
 - o Making the changes.



4. Use of starting distillates should be avoided. Correct maintenance will eliminate the need for this type of starting procedure.
5. Before starting any plant, ensure it is safe to start, not in gear, brakes are on, and that the operator is in the normal operating position.

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.

Date: October 1997

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