



DISTRACTED LOG TRUCK DRIVER DIES AFTER TREE-LENGTH LOAD CRUSHES CAB DURING ROLLOVER

Reviewed by: Clay Altizer, FRA Southwide Region Manager, caltizer@forestresources.org



SAFETY ALERT • MARCH 2022

22-S-04

BACKGROUND

A log truck driver was traveling on a paved road in the Southeastern US, hauling a load of tree-length pine pulpwood to a local paper mill. It was their second load that morning. Weather conditions were mostly cloudy, with a temperature of 55° F. A light rain occurred earlier in the day. The weather was not believed to be a cause for the accident; although, it could have potentially contributed to the rollover once the truck entered the ditch after leaving the road.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

The driver had almost three years of experience driving for their employer at the time of the accident and had a valid Commercial Driver's License.

ACCIDENT

The logging business owner indicated that the driver secured the load with binding straps prior to entering the roadway. Both a driver-facing and forward-facing dash cam were installed in the cab. Video footage confirmed that the driver was traveling 35 mph at the time of the accident and was not wearing a seatbelt. After traveling approximately 1.5 miles from the logging deck, the dash cam footage shows the driver beginning to cough and reaching up to adjust the heat settings inside the cab. When the driver took their right hand off the steering wheel to reach for the temperature control settings, the truck drifted to the right and traveled off the paved road and into the ditch. There was no shoulder present on this section of the road, and there was a 3-inch drop off from the pavement to the ditch. The ditch was soft and slightly muddy from the rain that had fallen earlier in the day. As the truck left the road and entered the ditch, it overturned onto the passenger side. While overturning, the tree-length pine load continued to travel forward, pushing the aluminum headache rack into the rear of the cab.

INJURY

The driver was crushed between the seat and the steering wheel. A passing motorist called EMS and then stopped by the logging deck to notify the crew of an accident a short distance away. When the crew arrived at the accident scene, they discovered that emergency responders were working to extract the driver. The driver was initially alert and communicating with emergency personnel. It took approximately 30 minutes to extract the driver from the wreckage. The driver remained conscious for about 20 minutes of the extraction period but was unresponsive when pulled from the overturned truck. After immediately attempting CPR, the driver was pronounced dead at the scene. After cleaning up the pulpwood post-accident and delivering it to the mill it was determined that the load was within legal weight limits. Inspections were current for both the cab and trailer. It was also determined after the accident that the binding devices used were the hand-ratcheting type and hooked onto the trailer, not the trailer-mounted binding system designed to properly secure the load.



This Safety Alert analyzes an injury in accordance with the chain of events represented by the five dominoes above. Pioneer industry safety experts H.W. Heinrich and Alfred Lateiner developed this accident analysis system to provide a graphic sense of how injuries can be avoided. Their methodology has been accepted by safety professionals worldwide.

Safety Meeting Report

Topic(s) Discussed:

Comments / Recommendations:

Date:

Company:

Names of Employees Attending:

Meeting Conducted by:

Please follow equipment manufacturers' recommendations for safe operation and maintenance procedures.

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UNSAFE ACTS/CONDITIONS

- The driver was operating a moving vehicle while distracted
- The driver took their eyes off the road and did not maintain two hands on the steering wheel during operation
- The driver was not wearing a seatbelt

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Heavy-duty steel headache racks should be mounted directly onto the trailer to keep shifting loads from gaining momentum and becoming projectiles during an accident
- Always use an appropriate load binding system designed to safely secure a load during transport



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