

INDUSTRY ALERT

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Injury

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Feller buncher operator injured escaping rollover through cab door

What happened?

A feller buncher operator was cutting a path on mossy, uneven ground. The tracks of the machine began to slide to the right on a thick layer of moss that covered a rock outcrop. The operator tried to stabilize the machine by swinging his boom which was loaded with trees, but the machine continued to slide and the right track slid off the ledge of rock, causing the machine to topple onto its right side.

The operator smelled smoke. Fearing that the feller buncher was catching fire, he quickly climbed out through the cab door. The heavy door slammed shut, trapping him on top of the machine about 3.6 metres (12 feet) off the ground. He started climbing down off the tracks to the rear of the overturned machine. At one point he lost his footing and his body weight pulled his hands off the very sharp edges of the tracks. He suffered cuts to both hands that required stitches, and the little finger of his right hand was fractured.

Why did it happen?

The mossy ground and blowdown concealed the rock outcrop and ledge. These hazards weren't noticed by layout personnel or the feller buncher operator. Fear of a fire caused the operator to exit quickly through the cab door instead of going through the escape hatch or the rear window. When the heavy cab door slammed shut, the operator was stranded on top of the feller buncher with no safe way down.

A subsequent investigation of the incident confirmed that a wiring harness leading to the fuel injection pump had shorted out and caught fire.

How can it be prevented?

The feller buncher operator participated in the incident investigation to identify what can be done to prevent this type of incident from happening again. A review of the incident with all employees highlighted the preferred exit routes from a feller buncher in such situations – the escape hatch or the rear window.

Shift supervisors reminded operators about the importance of using hand rails and steps, and of maintaining three-point contact – two hands and one foot or one hand and two feet – when climbing into or exiting a machine.

The company also initiated a review of the boundary-marking procedure with all staff and contract personnel. The operator, along with other members of the harvesting team, should walk the area to be worked in, recognizing and assessing terrain hazards such as drop-offs, swamps and water areas, chicots and other problem trees. If an area is deemed to be too dangerous for mechanical harvesting, it should be clearly outside the boundary of the designated harvesting area.

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Although the description of circumstances arises from an actual situation, this Industry Alert does not reflect the final analysis of the situation, nor is it meant to assign blame on the part of any person or member firm. For further information, contact OFSWA at 705-474-7233. For details on Ministry of Labour prosecutions regarding recent health and safety incidents in Ontario workplaces, visit www.labour.gov.on.ca and click on "News Releases".