

Workplace Fatality Summary Report:

Worker Fatally Injured While Unclogging a Baler

The Contents of this Report

This report summarizes the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety's Occupational Health and Safety Division investigation of a fatal incident. The information contained is intended for educational purposes only.

Incident Summary

The incident occurred while a worker was unclogging a baler. The supervisor had asked the worker to finish clearing a field of dry flax straw – a barbwire-like substance that is often burned because it takes years to fully break down. The worker was using a tractor to pull the baler as it gathered and dumped the straw into piles. After the section of land was complete, there was a buildup of straw on the machine's expeller roller – an attachment that removes material that collects behind the roll belts when the baler is running. The worker stopped the tractor, but did not turn it off. Power continued to be supplied to the baler. To access the roller, the worker lifted the machine's tailgate. As the machine's belts turned, the worker chopped at the material with a screwdriver and knife that had a short, curved blade. At that point, the roller's sharp blades caught on the workers' clothing. The worker was pulled into the machine and fatally injured.

Background Information

Worker:

The employer had shown the worker how to operate the baler and remove flax straw from the expeller roller two days prior to the incident. The worker had no formal training in operating and repairing the type of baler in use that day.

Equipment and Materials

Baler, Roll Belts and Expeller Roller:

The tractor pulled the baler while it gathered flax straw and dumped it into piles. The expeller roller was designed to remove debris that collected behind the machine's eight roll belts. However, flax straw wrapped around the roller and needed to be removed. The worker was directed to periodically stop the tractor, leave it running, cut power to the baler and clean off the roller. When the incident took place, the worker had lifted the baler's tailgate to access the expeller roller (see Figure 1).



Figure 1

Screwdriver and knife:

The worker used a screwdriver and knife with a short, curved blade to remove the buildup of straw from the expeller roller (see Figure 2).

Flax straw:

This thick, barbwire-like material is the by-product left in the field after harvesting linseed. Flax straw is often baled and then burned because it takes years to decompose. If this straw is not removed from fields, it wraps around machines' parts, plugs disks, wheels and seeder shanks.

Sequence of Events

The worker arrived at the farm between 7:00 a.m. and 8:00 a.m. At 9:00 a.m. the supervisor asked the worker to finish baling a field they had been clearing of flax straw for the past two days. Meanwhile the supervisor and employer worked elsewhere on the farm.

Around mid-morning, the supervisor called the worker who was baling to see how much longer it would take to do the job. The worker said the field would be done in a couple of hours.

Between noon and 1:30 p.m., the employer and supervisor noticed the worker had not returned to the farm yard. They both tried calling the worker, but no one answered.

At 3:00 p.m., the supervisor drove to the field and found the worker, who had succumbed to injuries caused by the baler. The tractor was running and the baler was idling. The expeller roller had been cleared of some flax straw and the tools the worker was using were on the ground.

It appeared the worker had parked the tractor and left it running as instructed, but had not cut the power to the baler. When the worker lifted the baler's tailgate, its belts and roller were moving. When the worker was chopping straw off the roller with the knife and screwdriver, the roller's sharp blades caught on the worker's clothing. The worker was pulled through the baler's roll belts and fatally injured.

Completion

The employer pleaded guilty to subsection 139(1) of *The Occupational Health and Safety Regulations, 1996* (being an employer, failed to ensure that before a worker undertakes the maintenance, repair, test or adjustment of a machine other than a power tool, the machine is locked out or remains locked out during that activity if not doing so would put the worker at risk, resulting in the death of a worker). The employer was fined \$50,000 plus a victim surcharge of \$20,000.



Figure 2