

Workplace Fatality Summary Report:

Worker Fatally Injured While Test Driving A Snowmobile

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 when a service technician was test driving a customer's snowmobile to replicate the conditions causing a loss of engine power. After inconclusive diagnostic testing at an indoor facility, the decision was made to take the machine to an off-site location so it could be tested while in use. They needed to drive the machine from low speed to maximum speed to determine when the snowmobile was losing power and the cause. The next day, the worker and the employer went to the off-site location where they took turns making passes up and down a stubble field with the snowmobile. The snowmobile functioned properly on the first three attempts, but they decided to try replicating the performance issue one more time. On the final pass, the worker did not return. The employer could no longer see the snowmobile or hear its engine running. At this point the employer searched for and found the worker lying in the snow with the machine idling approximately 30 metres away. Investigators determined that the west-ward moving snowmobile hit a roadside embankment at high speed, became airborne and landed in a field on the other side. The worker was thrown from the machine when it landed and was fatally injured.

Background Information

Worker:

The worker was fully trained on servicing snowmobiles. The worker had not received formal training on how to operate a snowmobile, which is considered workplace powered mobile equipment. Training was also not provided for the new worksite hazards.

Equipment and Materials

Snowmobile:

The snowmobile was light-weight for riding in deep snow, had a 160 horsepower engine and a manufactured maximum speed rating of 120km/hour. The tracks leading to the embankment and location where the snowmobile landed, revealed it was moving quickly west-ward when it made contact with the roadside embankment. The force of the collision propelled both the machine and the worker into the air and over the road. There were no tracks leading to the location where the snowmobile hit ground, which was 41 metres away from the point of impact in the field on the east side of the road. The snowmobile glided, came to a stop and was found idling 13 metres from where it had landed (see Figures 1 - 3).



Figure 1



Figure 2: Distance from point of impact to location where snowmobile landed



Figure 3: Distance from where snowmobile landed to where it stopped

Sequence of Events

When a client returned a snowmobile that was losing engine power for a second time, the employer and service technician tried everything they could to replicate the conditions causing the problem. After more inconclusive diagnostics, they made the decision to test the snowmobile outdoors. They needed to drive the machine from low speed to full speed in order to identify when the engine would fail and the cause.

The next day, the employer and the worker met at the workplace and drove to an off-site location in separate vehicles.

Once at the new location, they unloaded the snowmobile and drove it into a building where they hooked up Bluetooth diagnostics. The equipment would send live service reports to their cell phones while driving the machine.

The employer showed the worker the property's boundaries and directed the worker to drive the machine north out of the yard into a stubble field, drive west, turn and drive back east.

They took turns making passes across the field. The machine appeared to be functioning properly, so they decided to try replicating the issue one last time. If there were no problems, they would take the snowmobile back to the workplace.

The worker got back on the snowmobile and began driving it in the usual pattern. The employer could see the worker driving back and forth north of the yard. Around 12:00 p.m., the employer lost sight of the worker and could not hear the machine's engine.

The employer drove a truck into the field and followed the snowmobile tracks but did not find the worker. The employer then decided to use the public roads.

A short time later, the employer spotted the snowmobile idling on an adjacent property with the worker lying approximately 30 metres away from the machine.

Investigators determined that the west-ward moving snowmobile hit a roadside embankment at high speed. The impact from the collision propelled the machine into the air and over the road where it struck the ground, glided and eventually came to a stop. The worker was thrown from the machine when it landed and was fatally injured.

Completion

The employer pleaded guilty to clause 19(1)(b) of *The Occupational Health and Safety Regulations, 1996* (being an employer, failed to ensure that a worker is trained in all matters that are necessary to protect the health and safety of the worker when the worker is moved from one work activity or worksite to another that differs with respect to hazards, facilities or procedures, resulting in the death of a worker). The employer was fined \$25,000 plus a victim surcharge of \$10,000.