

MAFES Dawg Tracks

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Skid Steer Loader Safety



Skid steer loaders are used in a variety of arenas, such as agriculture, industry and construction areas. They are small, versatile and potentially dangerous if they are operated or maintained improperly. According to the Department of Labor, 37 workers in 10 states died while using or maintaining skid-steer loaders between the years of 1992 and 1997.

The 37 fatal Incidents:

- Ten occurred while the operator was either working or standing beneath the raised bucket.
- Eleven of the operators were caught or crushed between the bucket and the machine's frame (five while entering or exiting).
- Eight incidents involved the operator leaning out of the operator's compartment into the path of the ascending or descending lift arms and being crushed between the frame and the arm.
- Six of the remaining incidents were rollovers.

Know your machine:

- Balance is the key to the stability and turning capability of a skid steer. With no load in the bucket, 2/3 of the weight is on the back axles. The weight shifts to the front wheels when the bucket is loaded.
- Overloading will make the loader excessively front heavy. This reduces the stability and handling response. Never exceed the loaders' rated capacity.
- Never attempt to operate the controls from outside the machine. Hydrostatic drive means that the skid steer will respond instantly when the levers are engaged.
- Operation of controls becomes almost instinctive for an experienced operator. It is easy for novices to get confused as a result of having to perform many functions. If this happens, it is recommended to take your hands and feet off the controls - then all the machine functions will stop with no pressure on the controls.
- Do not remove the rollover protective structure from the machine - nor should you remove the side screens. Without the side screens it is easy to get caught between the loader arms and the skid steer frame.
- The seat belt and seat bar should be used whenever you are operating a skid steer.
- Always make sure that the attachment locking devices are in place, even if you are switching attachments for only a few minutes. If not locked, an attachment could break free and roll back down the loader arms, or fall onto a bystander.

Safe Skid Steer Travel:

- Skid steer stability decreases as the loader arms are raised. Always keep the bucket as low as possible when traveling or turning.
- Avoid steep slopes and rough terrain. Always travel up and down slopes - never across.
- Move up and down slopes with the heavy end of the loader pointed uphill. Remember, no load means most weight is on the rear of the skid steer; and a loaded bucket means more weight on the front.
- Try to go around obstacles rather than over or through them.
- Stay as far away from creeks, gullies or sloughs - as the banks are deep. Otherwise, the earth could sheer and send you and the machine crashing to the bottom.
- Road travel with a skid steer is not recommended.

Work Safely:

- Get familiar with the warning devices, gauges and controls. Study the operator's manual to get familiar with all aspects of operating a skid steer.
- Check for obstacles and soft soil conditions and overhead power lines.
- No riders must be permitted on the loader.
- Be careful when loading loose materials such as rocks. Lifting the arms too high and rolling the bucket back too far could cause the load or objects to fall into the cab. This is why it is so important to keep the bucket level while the arms are being raised.
- Adjust your speed according to the work conditions and terrain. Avoid sudden stops, starts or turns.
- Avoid dumping over a fence or similar obstructions that could enter the cab if the loader were to tip forward.
- Take care when backfilling. The trench wall could collapse under the skid steer's weight.
- Never undercut a high embankment. The earth could give away and bury you and the loader.
- Never place any part of your body or limb under the raised loader arms. That's why it is so important to keep the safety screens in place.
- If it is absolutely necessary to carry out repairs with the loader arms. Be sure that you lock them in place.

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