Ditching Machine Veers Into Operator



Getting caught between two diesel-operated ditching machines caused fatal injuries at a construction equipment salvage business. The victim was working alone in the scrap yard he owned.

He was using a mobile ditch-drilling machine to move a piece of I-beam about seven feet (two meters) long and weighing about 440 pounds (200 kilograms). He chained the steel beam to the bucket and engaged the drive mechanism. Rather than ride on the moving machine, he walked beside it over the rough packed dirt surface of the yard.

His coveralls became caught on the horizontal auger of the stationary ditching machine. Distracted, he did not see the other machine veer toward him. He was temporarily crushed between the two, but the mobile machine veered away and he was able to escape. He climbed onto the moving machine and turned off the key, then called for help from a neighboring business owner. No one saw the incident, but before he died in a hospital six days later, the victim told investigators how it happened.

It’s natural to adopt a casual attitude toward workplace hazards such as mobile equipment when a person has worked with them for a long time. Fatalities such as this remind us to stay on guard no matter how comfortable we feel with our work environment. In this case, the victim should have been operating the machine from the cab as instructed by the manufacturer’s manual. This incident is also a reminder about the danger of getting clothes caught in equipment, which in this case distracted this victim so that he did not see the moving machine swerve toward him.