Runaway Garden Tractor Jack-knifes



A young worker, new to the job, was operating a small garden tractor as part of a walkway construction in a park. He had about 100 hours of experience on the machine, but no formal training or written procedures. He was towing a trailer carrying about a half-ton of gravel. He and another young worker had just filled it and they started down the path with the other worker riding on the trailer. As they traveled down the seven per cent grade, the tractor and trailer began to jack-knife. The second worker jumped safely away. He turned around to see the tractor and trailer go over a bank into a ditch and land on the driver. The victim’s chest was crushed and he died.

It appears that the tractor was being driven in first gear with the throttle on high, rather than in low gear at half throttle as would have been appropriate. The passenger said that the driver may have depressed the clutch to change gears, allowing the tractor to begin freewheeling. Another factor in sending the tractor out of control was that the trailer, with its load and a passenger, was heavier than the tractor.

Even small garden tractors which are commonly used for lawn maintenance can be involved in fatal incidents. Remember to use a tractor according to the manufacturer’s instructions including weight restrictions. Be sure to obtain the necessary training to operate a tractor safely. Never disengage the clutch or shift to neutral on a slope because this can cause the tractor to speed up dangerously. Never allow passengers on the tractor or trailing equipment.