

Use Your Skid-Steer Loader Safely

By Jim Carrabba

Skid-steer loaders are powerful machines commonly found on farms today. Very maneuverable and versatile, skid-steers can operate in tight quarters and can have many types of added attachments. Skid-steer loaders differ from tractor-loader combinations in their configuration and steering capability. However, like a tractor, skid-steers can put people at risk for rollover and runover incidents. A unique feature of a skid-steer loader is the placement of the operator's seat between the lift arms and in front of the lift arm points. This placement makes it necessary for the operator to climb over the bucket and the front of the machine in order to enter and exit. In addition, the seated operator is very close to the zone of movement of the lift arms.

According to injury surveillance studies, the most common cause of death in skid-steer fatalities was being crushed between the lift arms and the frame of the machine or between the bucket and the machine frame. An injury surveillance study conducted by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) of 54 skid-steer related fatalities between the years of 1980-1992 found that being crushed between the lift arms and frame was the single largest cause of death (46%). Another NIOSH study conducted between the years of 1992-1997 of 37 skid-steer fatalities found that the majority (78%) were caused by being crushed between the lift arms and frame or between the bucket and frame. A study conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics between the years of 1992-1994 came up with similar results. Of the 20 skid-steer fatalities reported in this study, 14 (70%) were caused by being pinned between the loader bucket and frame or between the lift arms and frame.

To prevent these types of crushing incidents from occurring, manufacturers have been equipping skid-steers with interlocking controls, which prevent operational controls from being unintentionally engaged. Skid-steers first became equipped with these types of features in the early 1980's. All newer skid-steers will have a non-operational control such as a restraint bar, seatbelt, or pressure switch in the seat that must be activated in order for the operational controls to function.

There is no doubt that the interlock safety controls have probably helped save lives, but they are no substitute for continuing to follow safe work procedures. It could be possible for these interlock features to fail or if you operate an older model skid-steer, it may not be equipped with these safety features. No matter what skid-steer you have, always follow these simple rules to keep yourself from being injured or killed:

- Properly train all workers who will operate the skidsteer.
- Always perform an inspection of the skidsteer prior to using it. Correct any defects immediately before you use the skidsteer.
- When entering or exiting the machine, make sure the lift arms are lowered and the bucket is placed flat on the ground.
- If you must exit the machine with the lift arms raised, always engage the mechanical restraining device. Do not rely on just the hydraulic system.
- Never allow anyone to stand under a raised bucket. Never have anyone work out of a raised bucket.
- Never allow extra riders.
- The ROPS (Rollover Protective Structure) should never be removed or modified in any way.

- The side screens and any overhead shields or screens should never be removed.
- Seatbelts and restraint bars should always be used and never modified or bypassed.

NYCAMH is available to conduct skid-steer safety training at your farm. Skid-steer safety is one of the more requested trainings we have conducted on farms in New York. All of our on-farm safety training sessions are offered free of cost to farms in New York. We can also conduct the skid-steer safety training in Spanish for Hispanic workers. This training is available to any type of farm in New York and can be conducted at a time that is most convenient for your farm. In addition to skid-steer safety training, there are many more farm safety programs we can conduct for you. If you need more information or wish to schedule an on-farm safety survey or on-farm safety training session, contact Jim Carrabba, Farm Safety Education Specialist at (800) 343-7527 ext 239 or e-mail jcarrabba@nycamh.com. The on-farm safety training sessions and on-farm surveys are supported by a grant from the New York State Department of Labor Hazard Abatement Board. NYCAMH, a program of Bassett Healthcare Network, is enhancing agricultural and rural health by preventing and treating occupational injury and illness.