Machine Operator Crushed

A machine operator was killed when he lost control of the asphalt roller he was operating.

The 54-year-old was dispatched from the union hall that day and had been operating the equipment for approximately three hours. He had worked as an operating engineer for the past six years through the local union.

He was operating a nine-wheel asphalt roller, which is used to compact asphalt on a roadway. The 60,000-pound (27,215-kilogram) machine was working on a road with a four percent grade. The roller was equipped with rollover protection and the seat belt was found to be in good operating condition.

The engine stalled on the asphalt roller, causing a loss of hydraulics. The machine rolled backward, free wheeling and gaining speed estimated to be about 20 miles an hour (32 kilometers an hour). The machine traveled about one-fourth of a mile (.412 kilometers) before it left the road, hitting a light pole and the embankment and rolling completely over. It came to rest on its side. The operator had been ejected, and then crushed when the machined rolled over him.

Following are some contributing factors:

- The seat belt was found unbuckled. It is not known if the operator had been wearing it and had unbuckled in an attempt to escape the moving machine.
- The asphalt roller was found in the high gear/run mode. The manufacturer’s recommendation for operation on a grade is low gear mode.
- The emergency brake showed no evidence of being used.

Following are questions relevant to your workplace safety:

- Do you provide a worksite orientation for new employees?
- Are your operators required to use seat belts?
- Are your employees aware of the potential consequences when a seat belt is not worn while operating equipment with rollover protection?
- Are your workers trained in the use of the equipment they will operate, including the differences between similar machinery?
- Do your workers operate equipment in accordance with manufacturers’ specifications?