Driverless Truck Runs Down Spotter

A vehicle spotter who was controlling the movements of trucks in and out of the dumping bays at a landfill site was struck and killed by a runaway truck.

He had directed a truck into a dumping bay and it was in the process of unloading. The driver was at the rear of the truck operating the controls for ejecting the garbage. No one was in the cab and the engine was left running.

The victim walked toward the front of the truck. The truck moved forward suddenly, knocking the spotter down and running over him. He appeared to be holding onto the bottom of the truck for the first 70 to 100 feet of its travel. The truck continued to accelerate to about 40 miles an hour before it struck a snow bank and a fence, halting about 500 feet from where it started.

Investigation of this incident showed that alterations to the truck effectively removed a number of safeguards. Power from the engine is required to operate the compactor in the unloading process. The fuel pump had been tampered with to put the RPMs up to 1900 instead of the recommended 1200 to 1300. A safety switch was supposed to disengage the power takeoff as soon as the transmission went into drive to bring the packing unit back to idle. However, it had been tampered with. The truck was left in neutral. Pressure was applied to the accelerator by means of a weight. The gearshift was faulty and the truck accidentally shifted into gear. Although the brakes were in good condition, they had not been applied. It was common knowledge of workers on the crew that these alterations had been made to save everyone time and effort. This same truck had escaped once before on a city street.

Never tamper with safeguards. They are there for a reason – to make sure you do not get hurt.