Skid Steer Safety Talk

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Skid steers are a common piece of equipment found in a variety of industries. While they are small in size, the danger these machines can pose can be large. It is critical to take time to recognize the hazards present during the operation of skid steers so that the necessary best practices can be followed.

Skid steer loaders are one of the most useful pieces of heavy equipment in any fleet, offering power and versatility in a compact package. But just because they're smaller than many other types of heavy equipment, that doesn't mean they're any less of a potential safety risk.

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

OPERATIONAL HAZARDS

There is a magnitude of possible hazards for those individuals operating skid steers as well as those who work around these machines. Some of the major and more common hazards to consider:

- Struck-by hazards pose a serious threat for those working around skid steers. The operation of these machines often includes working in high traffic areas. Reversing is also a common necessity during work tasks. These factors paired with blind spots creates a huge risk for struck-by incidents to occur.
- Crushed-by hazards are also a major concern while operating a skid steer. Workers who are on the ground around this equipment can be pinned and crushed between a skid steer and another object if they find themselves in the line of fire. Those operating the skid steer can also fall victim to being crushed by their own machine. NIOSH looked at 37 fatalities involving skid steers from 1992 to 1997 and found that 29

(78%) of them resulted from “pinning between the bucket and frame or between a lift arm and frame”.
- Tip overs or roll overs are another leading cause for fatalities of the operators of skid steers. In the same study referenced above, 6 of the 37 fatalities resulted from roll overs.
- Pinch points are common on skid steers and can easily lead to injuries to body parts.

Workers attempting to operate the machine from outside the cab is a relatively common cause of death involving skid steers. This can and does result in being crushed by moving parts (under the attachment, between the attachment and the frame, between the lift arms and the frame or the cab, etc.).

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

GENERAL

Ensure your employees understand all manufacturer’s warnings and instructions before they operate skid steer loaders.

BEST OPERATIONAL PRACTICES

The following OSHA safety practices will minimize hazardous situations associated with operating skid steer loaders:

1. Always read and understand the operator’s manual before using the piece of equipment. Always follow the manufacturer’s recommendations and specifications when operating it.
2. Always lower the bucket or attachment so that it is flat on the ground. Do not attempt to activate the skid-steer loader’s controls from outside the operator’s compartment.
3. Do not leave the operator’s seat while the engine is on. Never attempt to activate the controls unless properly seated with the seatbelt fastened and the seat bar (if equipped) lowered. Keep all body parts inside the cab while operating a skid-steer loader.
4. Never modify, bypass, disable, or override safety systems.

Similarly, never operate equipment in which safety systems have been modified or are not working properly. Equipment with modified or malfunctioning safety systems should be taken out of service until repaired or replaced.

5. Never permit riders on the skid-steer loader, in the bucket or attachment, or in the operator's compartment unless the compartment is designed to accommodate a second rider.
6. Always keep bystanders a safe distance away from the work area.
7. Establish a routine maintenance and inspection program in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations. Inspect the skid-steer loader to ensure that all safety systems are functioning properly prior to operating the equipment.
8. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for maintaining the skid-steer loader. Never attempt maintenance or other work while lift arms or attachments are raised without using an approved lift arm support device. Replace protective guards and shields after repairs or service.
9. Train personnel on the proper inspection, use, maintenance, and repair of skid-steer loaders according to the manufacturer's instructions. Train supervisory personnel to identify hazards, such as safety systems that have been bypassed, disabled, or that require maintenance.

Other Safety Tips

- Do not work under the raised arms or bucket of a skid steer, even if it is off. Always put the bucket all the way down before exiting the machine.
- Setup work areas and tasks in such a way that ground personnel are not located in the line of fire. Stop work anytime sight is lost of anyone working around the skid steer.
- Always wear your seatbelt or engage the restraint bar if one is equipped.
- operating a skid steer.
- Never operate a skip steer without proper training.
- Operate the loader from the operator's compartment—never from the outside.

- Stay seated when operating the loader controls.
- Work with the seat belt fastened and the restraint bar in place.
- Keep your arms, legs, and head inside the cab while operating the loader.
- Load, unload, and turn on level ground when possible.
- Operate on stable surfaces only.
- Do not travel across slopes. Travel straight up or down, with the heavy end of the machine pointed uphill.

FINAL WORD

Skid-steers can be dangerous if workers do not observe certain safety precautions. Also, some employers may not fully appreciate the potential hazards associated with operating or working near skid-steers. Others may disregard the need to follow safe work procedures and bypass interlocks and other safety features.