Young Farmer Dies in Auger Entanglement

Roger*, who sowed the seeds of his farming career at the age of 13, may have scoffed at the foretelling of his death on a small farm in Iowa 22 years later. But who could have known his fate around the rotating shaft of a posthole digger? All there is left to do is learn from his tragedy.

Roger's Background
Roger began working on farms when he turned 13. The years passed until he bought and operated his own ranch, where he lived alone and worked on it nights, weekends and holidays. His days were filled working for a local farmer.

What Happened
In the fall of 2005, Roger set about building a fence with a posthole digger (auger) that he borrowed from his employer. Somehow he became entangled in the auger, which amputated his right arm. He died of multiple blunt force trauma and other injuries to his head, neck and extremities.

The Investigation
Roger's fatality was not witnessed, but investigators surmised how the incident occurred. There was clothing, along with body tissue, wrapped around the upper portion of the auger, and the victim's severed arm was found next to the posthole digger. Roger's body was discovered about 30 feet (10 meters) from the tractor. Investigators found a broken handled shovel at the site, where dirt was spread away from where it would pile up around the hole. An operator working too close to the auger; clearing dirt, for example, could come in contact with moving machinery, investigators noted. It was also reported that no guard existed in the area where the auger connects to the gearbox output shaft. It wasn't concluded that Roger was wearing loose clothing; his attire consisted of jeans, sweatshirt, flannel shirt and T-shirt. However, investigators said frayed or loose clothing would be more susceptible to being snagged by moving machinery parts.

Workers Take Heed

Employees should follow these recommendations to prevent similar deaths when working with tractor PTO (power take-off) devices and rotating augers:

- Tractor operators should disengage drive elements and shut off the tractor’s engine before leaving the operator’s station (cab or seat).
- Operators, and others, should stay clear when the posthole digger is in operation. Workers may be tempted to clear accumulated dirt away from the hole while the auger is running, but this is very dangerous and could result in entanglement.
- Posthole auger drive elements should be guarded with all shielding in place.
- Work areas should be clear of slip, trip and fall hazards.
- Loose clothing should not be worn around rotating equipment or machinery.

**The names aren’t real, but the incidents are. These accounts are based on actual fatality investigations.*