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SAFETY ALERT

09-S-2

SKIDDER OVERTURNS ON STEEP HILL AND KILLS OPERATOR

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BACKGROUND: On a warm, dry, summer day in the Appalachians, a grapple skidder operator was traveling empty from the log deck to the area where a tracked cutter was operating. The topography was rolling hills with occasional steep slopes.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS: The 68-year-old skidder operator had worked with this logging company for approximately four years but had been logging and operating forestry equipment for most of his life. He was considered fully trained, had no physical disabilities or previous accident history, and he was wearing personal protective equipment.

UNSAFE ACTS AND CONDITIONS: The skidder operator was heading uphill on an extremely steep slope when his blade hit a 12-inch-diameter, 12-inch-tall stump on the right side of the skid trail. The skid trail was approximately 25 feet wide and was composed of loose, dry soil. The skidder operator was not wearing his seatbelt.

ACCIDENT: When the skidder blade hit the stump, it caused the skidder's right front tire to jump up on the stump. The other skidder tires began spinning. Evidence indicates that the skidder became unsteady, its center of gravity was exceeded, and the skidder began to flip onto its right side. It continued to roll 175 feet downhill across another skid trail, knocked down a few small trees, and struck a 12-inch-diameter yellow poplar. It appears that the skidder rolled over approximately four to five times before coming to a stop against the yellow poplar on the side hill.



INJURY: The operator was killed inside the skidder cab due to massive chest trauma.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CORRECTION:

- 1) Require equipment operators to wear seatbelts when operating logging machinery.
- 2) Employers should conduct safety meetings to discuss the hazards of operating logging equipment on steep slopes and the danger of exceeding a machine's center of gravity.

Reviewed by:
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Please follow equipment manufacturers' recommendations for safe operation and maintenance procedures.