

On June 6, 2023, a Texas A&M Forest Service employee received an injury to the foot while working around a piece of equipment on the Fairchild State Forest in Cherokee County.

### **Narrative**

On the day of the incident, four Texas A&M Forest Service employees were working in the Fairchild State Forest as part of their routine job duties. The crew was moving a John Deere 5400 farm tractor with an open-land tree planter attached to the rear three-point hitch. The operator of the tractor was having difficulty shifting and getting the tractor into gear. They stopped, turned off the tractor's engine, and let the front-end loader bucket down to rest on the ground.



Photo of an open-land tree planter, removed from the tractor

As part of their normal job duties, the operator and the other employees are required to perform routine maintenance and mechanical repairs to equipment. When they began to diagnose the problem, the operator was seated on the tractor, one employee was working from behind the tractor, one employee was working from the side, and the other was observing from a short distance away. The crew began to disassemble the covers and levers

from around the shifter to try to identify the problem causing the tractor to not shift properly. During this process, the lever to the hydraulic three-point hitch was accidentally pushed to the down position, making the approximately 1000-lb. planter quickly lower onto the employee's feet that was standing behind the tractor. The cutting disk landed on top of the left foot, cutting through his leather work boot and into the steel-toed protection of the boot. The tractor was immediately started, and the planter lifted off his foot. Employees moved and sat the injured employee down and removed his boot. Due to the pain and signs of injury, the employee was transported to the local emergency room for treatment. He had bruising on the left foot but no broken bones. He was treated and released later that day.

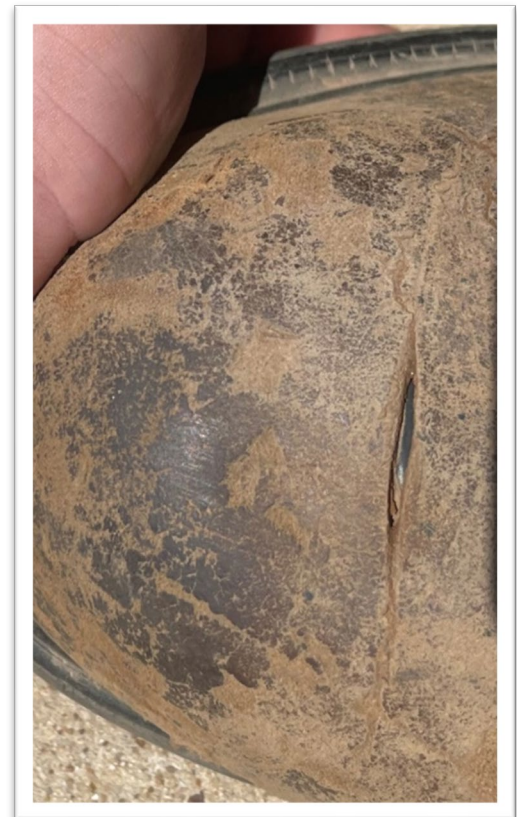
## Lessons Learned

***“Put all implements on the ground, whether you are going to be a second or minutes. Never know what could happen” -Injured Employee***

- When working around equipment that has attachments, make sure to lower or secure attachments in place before working around them. This could be as simple as lowering the implement to the ground or may require you to take time to lock, chain, or block them up into place before working around them.
  - Do you know how to secure implements on the equipment you work around?

***“In my opinion, the fact that he did have steel toes on had the biggest effect on the incident due to where the coultter wheel hit, saving three toes on the left foot and possibly cutting into the right foot.” -Tractor Operator***

- Currently, Texas A&M Forest Service does not have any policies in place that require employees to wear steel or safety toe boots on non-fire related job duties. However, the nature and diversity of our jobs put us into situations where we are working around large, heavy objects such as heavy equipment, sawing large trees, and working in a shop environment.
  - Does your agency have a policy in place to address footwear worn during non-fire operations?
- A lot of the time, complacency is the underlying factor in an incident. We all become accustomed to doing things a certain way. We think, “I have done this a thousand times without anything happening”, and we proceed with our task without thinking about it much and not even realizing the risks we are taking. As you are performing a task, stop and take a second, and think safety first.
  - What are the risks?
  - How can I mitigate them?
  - Do I have the proper PPE, tools, etc. to perform this safely?



Right boot where cutting wheel pierced through the leather