Loading & Unloading Large Heavy Forestry Plant

June 2018

Loading and unloading large and heavy forestry plant on and off low loaders and flatbed trailers is likely to be one of the more hazardous forestry operations carried out on a site. The operation requires careful planning:

A recent driver’s accident involved a hand being crushed while loading a harvester onto a low loader.

Here are some tips on taking precautionary safety measures:

- For forestry sites where heavy plant is to be transported by low loaders – you need to put in place a well communicated plan for safely loading and unloading;
- Loading and unloading should only be undertaken at designated areas (identified by a competent person) with level and stable ground, which is free of obstructions and has enough space to safely manoeuvre both the low-loader and the vehicle being loaded/unloaded;
- The harvester driver and the lorry driver must be both trained and competent in loading, securing and unloading forestry vehicles.
- The lorry driver must have been provided with clear instructions and information, and adequate training by their employer, for this type of work.
- The lorry driver should be given the manufacturers tie down guide for the relevant machine and the lorry driver is responsible for the security of his load.
- The trailer should be of an appropriate size for the vehicle being loaded. The ramps need to be wide enough for the vehicle and long enough to avoid steep angles;
- The surface of the ramps and the deck of the trailer should be non-slip and free of any material such as mud or ice that can increase the chance of slipping;
- Special attention should be paid to the loading or unloading of tracked vehicles. Band tracks should be removed, where possible, before loading. To avoid tracked vehicles slipping and to protect wooden decks from damage, rubber matting can be used if appropriate, especially at the top of the ramps where tracks are more prone to slippage;
- As most forest machines are oversized and the wheels invariably have overhang on the flatbed, the ideal guide is always from the neck of the flatbed where the lorry operator has vision to both sides of the forest machine; and the machine operator has vision of the individual providing guidance and that the driver is in the lowest crawler gear when loading;
- If an inappropriate trailer is brought to a site or if either the lorry operator or the forestry vehicle operator has concerns over safety of loading /unloading operation then the work should not proceed and competent assistance should be sought.
- Use risk assessments to carry out an assessment of risk and plan the work.

The lesson learnt has highlighted that the harvester operator was unable to fully see the head for lowering as it was obscured by the bonnet of his machine and meaning the driver guiding the machine was out of view. The harvester company are now in the process of reviewing its own assessments so that in the future it will reduce the risk of this type of accident occurring again.