Bypass Start Is a Killer



An 84-year-old man, who had farmed the same land for 60 years, was killed while his wife watched when he bypass – started a tractor. He stood between two tractors and attached jumper cables to both batteries. Instead of clambering into the driver's seat and starting the tractor with the key, he used pliers to bypass the ignition switch and short-circuit the starter of the second tractor. When it started, the second tractor lurched forward, hitting him. He fell, and was run over, pulled under the tire and ejected behind the tractor. The left rear tire of the tractor spun, spitting mud and digging itself five feet into the muddy field, immobilizing the machine.

The victim's wife, who had followed him in a truck, stayed in the parked vehicle until she noticed that her husband might have been injured. Unable to walk across the muddy and rutted field, she drove to a neighbor's house. By the time the neighbor returned with her, her husband was buried under mud thrown off the tire, except for one foot.

The victim should have started his tractor engine from the operator's seat with the transmission and power take-off in neutral and the parking brake engaged. He should have followed safe start-up procedures included in the operator's manual and designated by decals on the tractor. When he finished using it the previous time, the farmer should have properly shut the machine down, leaving the transmission out of gear and the brakes engaged.

Source: Oklahoma Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) Program, Case Report 05OK038