

Driver saves pilot after helicopter hits tractor

By SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN
Capital Press

The first moment Logan Schneider realized something wasn't right was when tree branches and leaves in front of him began shaking violently.

Nineteen-year-old Schneider was driving his dad's tractor through his brother's sweet cherry orchard near Orondo, Wash., listening to a Morgan Wallen country song in noise-canceling headphones, when the leaves started shuddering.

Then he heard thumping behind him.

Schneider turned around to see a helicopter hit high-voltage power lines, then careen downward, its rotor blades hurling toward him.

There was no time to move, Schneider says.

The helicopter smashed into the tractor, its nose landing against Schneider's back and pinning him against the steering wheel. He doesn't



A young man was working in a cherry orchard in Washington state when a helicopter crashed into his tractor. The tractor operator survived and saved the pilot's life.

Orondo Firefighters Association

remember feeling pain in that moment, as adrenaline coursed through his body.

Pushing off the steering wheel, he managed to wriggle free and get away from the tractor, avoiding the helicopter's blades.

Then, Schneider recalls, he heard the pilot screaming: "Somebody, help me! Help!"

The young man rushed back toward the tangled equipment, now ablaze.

"I really wasn't thinking. I just knew I had to get him out," said Schneider.

The young farmer recalls that, approaching the helicopter, he felt intense heat on his skin and breathed in the overpowering smell of fuel.

The pilot, Schneider says,

was hanging upside down, struggling to unbuckle his seatbelt with a broken arm. The young man unclasped the pilot and pulled him out.

As the two walked away from the fire, Schneider says the pilot kept saying "thank you," "you saved my life" and "I'm sorry."

The teen called 911 and recalls that first responders

arrived within 10 minutes.

Orondo Firefighters Association reports it responded to the incident, near Turtle Rock four miles south of Orondo, at 9:20 a.m. July 6.

At first, firefighters struggled to access the wreckage, hindered by the high-voltage power lines the helicopter had struck. Once the power lines were de-energized, the association says its team extinguished the fire. The firefighters were joined by first responders from Ballard Ambulance and the Douglas County Sheriff's Office.

Soon, Schneider and the pilot — named Cory Johnson, according to a public records official at Douglas County Sheriff's Office — were lying in the back of an ambulance headed to Central Washington Hospital.

Schneider had second-degree burns on his arm, and as he later learned, will need physical therapy for muscle damage to his back. The teenager recalls that Johnson looked worse, lying in the ambulance with a broken arm and burns across his chest and back.

Central Washington Hospital did not respond to a request for comment on Johnson's condition.

It's unclear why the crash happened. The Federal Aviation Administration says it's investigating, and officials are inspecting the Hiller UH-12E helicopter.

According to the FAA, in 2021, there were 114 civil helicopter accidents out of about 3 million annual flight hours across the U.S. — about 3.9 accidents per 100,000 flight hours.

Schneider said he feels fortunate that both he and Johnson lived.

"Somebody was watching and protecting me," he said. "God definitely saved me."

Amazed by Schneider's luck, friends and family members urged him to try his luck a little further and play the lottery. The teenager bought his first lottery ticket and won \$2.

In spite of the life-threatening helicopter incident, Schneider, who graduated from Eastmont High School last year, remains steadfast in his desire to become a pilot. The young man plans to start flight school at Big Bend Community College in Moses Lake, Wash., in September.

"I want to explore, see places in the world," he said. "I still want to be a pilot."

California truckers panic after Supreme Court declines to review AB 5 case

State law changed most truckers into employees, not owner-operators

By SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN
Capital Press

A recent U.S. Supreme Court decision not to review a case regarding worker classifications could force up to 70,000 of California's truck owner-operators off the road, a trucking organization said.

"Gasoline has been poured on the fire that is our ongoing supply chain crisis," the California Trucking Association said of the Supreme Court's decision.

The decision could affect agricultural exporters and others who rely on trucks.

The conflict is over a 2019 California law called Assembly Bill 5, or AB 5, which makes it more difficult for businesses to treat workers as independent contractors rather than employees.

AB 5 codified a stringent three-pronged "ABC test" to

determine whether workers are independent contractors.

The issue matters to businesses because employees are entitled to overtime pay, benefits and the minimum wage, making them more expensive than independent contractors. California's trucking industry has long relied heavily on an "owner-operator" gig economy model with independent contractors who own their trucks.

"It's more expensive to have employees versus work with owner-operators," Matt Schrap, CEO of Harbor Trucking Association, told agricultural exporters at a recent conference.

The trucking industry has fought to be exempt from California's ABC test. Truckers argue that AB 5 should not be applicable to truckers because federal regulations governing the industry under the Federal Aviation Administration Authorization Act of 1994 pre-empt the ABC test.

The California Trucking Association and other groups



Farm Supply/EO Media Group File

California truckers are concerned about the U.S. Supreme Court's decision not to review a case regarding worker classification, which the industry claims could take 70,000 truckers off the road.

say the law created a uniform nationwide standard so trucking companies wouldn't have to comply with a patchwork of state laws.

Initially, a federal judge in San Diego agreed with the trucking association that AB 5 was pre-empted by federal law. The judge issued a preliminary injunction, which temporarily preserved the status quo.

Then, April last year, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals reversed that ruling. The court concluded that

the California Trucking Association filed for a writ of certiorari with the Supreme Court, requesting the high court weigh in on whether the federal law pre-empts AB 5.

On June 30, the Supreme Court, without comment, denied the California Trucking Association's petition, meaning the 9th Circuit's ruling stands.

From June 30, truck owner-operators had seven days to get in compliance with AB 5 or "cease longstanding independent businesses," according to the trucking association.

"In addition to the direct impact on California's 70,000 owner-operators who have seven days to cease

longstanding independent businesses, the impact of taking tens of thousands of truck drivers off the road will have devastating repercussions on an already fragile supply chain, increasing costs and worsening runaway inflation," wrote the association.

The high court's decision was welcomed by California attorney general's office.

"We're pleased with the court's decision to reject this challenge to AB 5's application to the motor carrier industry," said a spokesperson. "At the California Department of Justice, we'll continue to do our part to defend laws that are designed to protect workers and ensure fair labor and business practices."

Washington cap-and-trade cost estimates increased

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

A Washington Department of Ecology consultant projects that cap-and-trade auctions next year will be more costly for fuel suppliers and manufacturers than originally expected.

Vivid Economics predicts that allowances will go for at least \$41 each, nearly double the \$22.78 state agencies estimated in 2021.

An allowance will grant the right to emit 1 ton of carbon dioxide. High auction prices will increase business costs while raising more money for state-funded climate-reduction programs.

Allowances could average \$58 or \$68 in 2023 under two other scenarios analyzed by Vivid. The firm did not project cap-and-trade's impact on gasoline and diesel prices.

The state in 2021 estimated auctions would raise \$441 million in government revenue the first year. The figure has not yet been updated based on Vivid's forecast, Ecology spokesman Andrew Wineke said Tuesday.

NERA Economic Consulting, hired by the Western States Petroleum Association, estimated Ecology's proposed cap-and-trade rules will increase gas prices by 56 cents a gallon and diesel by 64 cents in 2024.

Ecology maintains that its proposal will increase pump prices by less than 1%.

Supply-and-demand and global events, such as COVID and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, drive fuel prices, Wineke said. "Regulations play a very minor role in the price people pay at the pump," he said.

Whatever the additional cost, fuel suppliers probably will pass them along to Washington motorists, Washington Research Council economist Kriss Sjoblom said Tuesday.

The world market sets fuel prices and suppliers aren't limited to serving Washington, he said. The auctions also will be another reason for pump prices to fluctuate, he said.

"Because there is uncertainty about what allowance prices will be, it probably adds a bit to the volatility of gas prices," Sjoblom said.

The Legislature in 2021 passed cap-and-trade, the centerpiece of Gov. Jay Inslee's climate agenda. To carry out the law, Ecology has proposed 138 pages of regulations.

Auctions are at the heart of the rules. Beginning next year, large carbon-emitters will bid for allowances. The number of allowances auctioned off will decline each year.

Allowances are expected to become increasingly

expensive as the state moves closer to its goal of cutting emissions by 45% by 2030 and 95% by 2050.

State agencies in 2021 projected the cost of allowances based on California's experience, which has been holding cap-and-trade auctions since 2014. For many years, allowances were going for near the minimum price, though they have been rising recently, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Vivid warned allowance prices were uncertain. Many factors will influence prices, including how fast drivers convert to electric vehicles, reducing demand from fuel suppliers for allowances.

Merging Washington's cap-and-trade auctions with those jointly held by California and Quebec also would hold down allowance prices, according to Vivid.

Presumably, a bigger pool of allowances will hold down bids. Ecology will start looking at linking up with California and Quebec once it's finalized Washington's cap-and-trade rules.

Food Northwest, a trade association of food processors, says cap-and-trade will increase the cost of making food in Washington.

If Ecology doesn't hold down allowance costs, food makers may move to Idaho, the association said in comments sent to Ecology.



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