

Safety Alert

STRUCK BY OBJECT DURING REMOTE CUTTING OPERATIONS.

Incident Description

On the 30th November whilst undertaking vegetation clearance to the embankment/grass verge of the A1 carriageway in Cambridgeshire, a piece of wood was ejected from a remote-controlled vegetation mulcher whilst the machine was in operation. The object struck the operator on his left leg (below his knee).

The causation was that during operations and as the mulcher was moving forward, the machine ran over a raised tree stump which caused the flail hood to lift allowing a lone piece of debris to shoot out and hit the operator from distance. The operations were carried out at night, and under a full road closure due to proximity and volume of live traffic. Work had been successfully carried out previously.

The Injured Party (IP) stated that he was approximately 10-17m away from the rear of the remote-controlled device whilst it was in operation and he was at a point some 45 degrees to the operation. Following the event, work was stopped and the area made safe.

Immediately following the incident, the IP advised that he felt OK, the following day the IP attended A&E where he was diagnosed with a broken left leg. The IP was kept in overnight due to severe swelling to the injury and will potentially have 2-3 months off work.

The incident was reported as a 'specified injury' under RIDDOR.



McCannel Robocut Mulcher

Immediate Actions Taken

- Work suspended and an exclusion zone set up around the incident area.
- Robocut Mulcher suspended from use on the contract until additional controls and investigation completed.
- Safe Systems of Work (SSoW) reviewed ensuring exclusion zones are clearly identified and controlled effectively.
- Manufacturer (McConnel) contacted regarding lessons learnt and potential improvements to equipment and operator guidelines (ongoing).

Root Cause:

- Obstructions within the work area which had not been identified prior to starting work.
- Potentially unsatisfactory exclusion zones: manufacturer's recommendation states 5 m exclusion zone to the side of the equipment. This is currently under review with the manufacturer.
- Insufficient lighting to the work area is considered to be a contributory factor.

Actions to Prevent Re Occurrence:

- Safe Systems of Work to be fully reviewed.
- Provide suitable lighting levels for night ops.
- Re brief all robotcut operators on the safe operating procedures.
- Review safety distances – under review with manufacturer.
- SSoW – PPE – extra precautions relating to strimming leg guards reflected in Risk Assessment and Method Statement (RAMS).

Suggested Action for all Highways England work sites

- Where using this, or similar, items of plant.
- Review the suitability of exclusion zones,