

# REAL LIFE LESSONS

## FROM TRUCK DRIVERS INJURED AT WORK



### DRIVER INJURES HEAD PULLING FIFTH-WHEEL RELEASE

John worked for a company that pulled reefer trailers. For the most part, John kept the same trailer couple all of the time – that is unless the truck or trailer needed service. On March 30<sup>th</sup> his trailer needed to be dropped at the company shop for service to the refer unit. The company had a very small area to park trailers, so all of the trailers were dropped pretty close to one another. In fact, there was only about 5 feet of clearance on either side of his trailer when John backed his trailer into the only empty spot he could find. He climbed out of his truck, lowered the landing gear and grabbed his fifth-wheel hook. Once he reached his fifth-wheel hook under the trailer and began to pull, he noticed that the fifth-wheel release was a bit stubborn and that he would need to pull harder. As John pulled hard, the hook came loose and he flew backwards into the next trailer. The back of his head struck the bottom edge of that trailer causing a 2 inch cut that bled profusely. He ran to the office with his blood-soaked hand covering the cut. The mechanic (who was also an EMT for the local fire department) was there and provided first-aid, getting the bleeding under control. John was then taken to the local hospital where he received 17 stitches.

A review of this incident revealed that the fifth-wheel hook that John was using was aluminum (a soft metal). As he pulled on the stubborn fifth-wheel release hard, the hook portion straightened and slipped off of the fifth-wheel release handle.

### LIFE LESSON

Although John only lost 2 days of work because of this incident any head trauma is serious. Certainly for John the following life lesson will forever be embedded in his mind.

Using a fifth-wheel hook is recommended. However, soft-metal hooks (such as those made from aluminum) are unsafe as they are too susceptible to bending.

When using a hook to pull a fifth-wheel release get a wide foot stance, with your rear foot parallel with the trailer. Such a stance will help you maintain your stability if the hook slips off of the fifth-wheel release handle.



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