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For Immediate Release:  
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## **South Kitsap toddler dies following backyard accident**

**Port Orchard, Wash.** – What started as a routine, summertime task ended up in tragedy late this morning, when a young boy was struck by a riding lawnmower. The youngster was transported to Mary Bridge Children's Hospital in Tacoma where he died upon arrival.

The child was identified as Tyler Johnson, age 2, of South Kitsap.

Kitsap County Sheriff's Office patrol deputies and a detective responded to a residence in the 5000 block of East Collins Road, South Kitsap, shortly before 11:00 a.m. today, following a 911 dispatch of the accident. EMS Units from South Kitsap's Fire District 7 were already on-scene performing life saving measures on the child when deputies arrived.

Detective's investigation revealed that an adult family member was operating a riding lawnmower to cut the grass in the backyard of the property, after placing Tyler near a children's sandbox in the middle of the yard. A portion of the backyard, approximately four feet wide by 20 feet long, runs north-to-south between a property line fence and the residential structure. The strip is not wide enough to allow the riding mower to be turned around.

When approaching the narrow strip, the lawnmower driver saw Tyler near the sandbox, approximately 25 feet away. At the end of the narrow piece of lawn the driver placed the mower into reverse and started to back-up. The mower reversed a few feet when the driver felt the mower strike something. The mower stopped and the driver looked down and observed Tyler. The machine was large and too heavy to lift. The driver called 911 immediately and EMS units arrived at the residence within eight minutes. The responding firefighter-EMTs and paramedics were able to turn the riding mower onto its side to free the youngster. Lifesaving measures were then initiated.

Sheriff's detectives have determined that the incident was accidental. There are no criminal implications and the investigation is now closed.

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## **Safety Considerations**

- Many “fender-bender” and vehicle-pedestrian type mishaps occur in parking lots, or in driveways in residential areas, involving vehicles that are reversing.
- These types of accidents may also happen when operating heavy equipment or lighter-weight motorized lawn care machinery.
- Vehicle drivers and machinery operators often do not have clear visibility of the immediate space surrounding their cars, trucks or equipment, due to obstructions or vehicle/machinery height above ground.
- Drivers and operators are urged to ensure clearance before reversing their vehicles or equipment. This may take the form of warning devices, such as backing horns, bells or lights, coupled with utilizing a second person to guide the vehicle as it reverses out of a close space.
- When not clearly sure of what is behind your vehicle or equipment, take a moment to exit the vehicle or dismount from the machinery and visually check the immediate surrounding area.
- Keep children away from any areas involving the use of motorized equipment, due to their small stature (making them less visible), their inability to mentally process and recognize dangerous situations, and their natural curiosity to get up-close to see what is going on.

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