

Tractor Driver Killed by Flying Metal Object¹

California NURSE Project²

SUMMARY : CASE 192-040-01

A tractor driver was pulling a mulcher (which cuts wood into smaller pieces) over cut branches in an orange grove. He owned an orange grove and knew how to use a mulcher. When rounding a row of orange trees, a small metal object was thrown by the blades, exiting through the back of the mulcher. This metal object bounced off the back of the mulcher and struck the tractor driver in the forehead.

A relative found him several hours later, slumped over in the seat on the tractor which had run up against an orange tree. He was unconscious. He was taken, by ambulance, to a hospital. He stayed in a coma and was pronounced brain dead two days later.

How could this death have been prevented?

- The mulcher should have had a guard over the back.
- Tractor drivers can wear helmets to prevent flying objects from hitting them in the head.
- Employers should have injury prevention programs. These programs can help workers and employers identify and fix hazards (such as an unguarded mulcher).

The NURSE (Nurses Using Rural Sentinel Events) project is conducted by the California Occupational Health Program of the California Department of Health Services, in conjunction with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. The program's goal is to prevent occupational injuries associated with agriculture. Injuries are reported by hospitals, emergency medical services, clinics, medical examiners, and coroners. Selected cases are followed up by conducting interviews of injured workers, co-workers, employers, and others involved in the incident. An on-site safety investigation is also conducted. These investigations provide detailed information on the worker, the work environment, and the potential risk factors resulting in the injury. Each investigation concludes with specific recommendations

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2. NURSE Project, California Occupational Health Program, 2151 Berkeley Way, Annex 11, Berkeley, CA 94704.