

Heavy Equipment Operator Crushed in Roll Over¹

California NURSE Project²

SUMMARY : CASE 291-002-01

A vineyard hired a heavy equipment operator to dig irrigation ditches and mix fertilizer. The operator used a back-hoe and front-loader (a broad shovel) mounted on a large tractor. His tractor had a *roll over protection structure*, a U-shaped bar over the driver's seat. The tractor's seat belt was broken and could not be fastened.

The operator finished his job mixing fertilizer, and drove his tractor down a dirt road that ran along a drainage ditch. He was traveling slowly. For unknown reasons the tractor slid into the drainage ditch and tipped over. Without a seat belt the operator fell out of his seat and into the ditch. The tractor was still turning over. The roll bar rolled over the operator, crushed his chest, and killed him.

How could this death have been prevented?

- Make sure all safety equipment is working before starting the work. The seat belt of this tractor was missing its metal insert and could not be fastened.
- Do not operate heavy equipment or motor vehicles without wearing a seat belt.
- Identify hazards in the work area. Apparently the operator was not aware of the drainage ditch.

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 designed to prevent injuries, for the use of employers, workers, and others concerned about health and safety in agriculture.

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