

Tree Trimmer Electrocuted in Orchard¹

California NURSE Project²

SUMMARY : CASE 192-036-01

A tree trimmer was pruning walnut trees in an orchard. He used a *lift bucket* (a "cherry picker") attached to a mobile platform, which he could raise, lower and move along the rows of trees while standing in the bucket. At the edge of the orchard, high voltage power lines crossed over the last row of trees just above the tree tops. The power company was usually called in to trim these trees.

However, on this day the worker began pruning the last row of trees. He raised his *lift bucket* to the top of one tree. His pruning shears touched the power line and he was electrocuted. Although co-workers pulled the lift bucket and platform away from the power lines with a truck, the worker died instantly. His body was badly burned.

How could this death have been prevented?

- Hold safety meetings before every shift, warning workers of dangers in their area.
- Ask the power company to shut off power to lines in the work area, instead of expecting workers to avoid the lines.
- Work as a team. Other tree trimmers in the orchard should be on the look-out for danger.
- Mark dangerous areas for employees to avoid, such as trees near power lines.
- Use tree trimmers who are specially trained to work near power lines.

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.

1. This document, CDHS(COHP)-FI-92-005-12, was extracted from a series of the Nurses Using Rural Sentinel Events (NURSE) project, 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. Publication date: May 1992.

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