

Dairy Worker Crushed by Field Cultivator¹

California NURSE Project²

SUMMARY : CASE 192-164-01

A worker on a dairy farm was waiting behind a field cultivator to attach it to the back of a tractor. A cultivator is a piece of farm machinery that has a row of metal teeth, set in a rectangular frame, with a wheel at each end. When pulled by a tractor the teeth break up the soil. This cultivator was set on its wheels and two support poles, which kept it from tipping backwards.

The worker stood close behind the cultivator. In front, a tractor driver was lining up his tractor to this cultivator. The driver's foot slipped on the clutch, and his tractor jumped backward and hit the cultivator. One of the support poles broke, and the cultivator fell over backwards and onto the worker. The cultivator frame landed on the worker's hips and stomach, separating his pelvic bones. He lay pinned by the cultivator and in great pain until enough workers arrived to lift the cultivator off him. He was taken to the hospital by helicopter, and could not return to work for over two months.

How could this injury have been prevented?

- Workers should not stand in the path of moving equipment. They should wait to one side until the equipment stops moving.
- Before hooking equipment to the tractor, turn off the tractor engine and set the parking brake.
- Make equipment safe. Outrigger wheels will keep cultivators from tilting over.

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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