

## **Cotton Harvester Operator Fatally Electrocuted<sup>1</sup>**

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California NURSE Project<sup>2</sup>

### **SUMMARY: CASE 193-488-01**

Four brothers and a father were helping a relative harvest cotton. All five of their cotton harvester machines were busy in the field when it began to rain. They decided to stop where they were, and empty the cotton already in the cotton harvester's baskets. The cotton is emptied into a machine (cotton module builder) that packs the cotton into large bales. This machine was parked directly under high voltage power lines.

A driver emptied his cotton into the parked machine. However, roughly 100 pounds of wet cotton stuck in the basket. The cotton harvester operator yelled to the driver to keep the basket raised so he could clean it out.

The cotton harvester operator climbed on top of the machine to get to the basket. Just as he touched the basket, he was electrocuted. His father, then the paramedics, tried to get his heart pumping again. Nonetheless, within one hour the cotton harvester operator was pronounced dead at the hospital.

How could this injury have been prevented?

- Employers should have written safety programs. These programs can help workers and supervisors identify hazards such as power lines.
- Employers should follow standard operating procedure no matter whose field they are working in. On their own farm, family members never parked the cotton module builder under high voltage power lines.
- Every work crew should have a person certified in first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).

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.