

Cotton Harvester Operator's Arm Mangled in Cotton Harvester Spindles¹

California NURSE Project²

SUMMARY: CASE 193-489-01

A cotton harvester operator was warming up his cotton harvester before going out to the field. While sitting in the cab, he heard a strange noise coming from the front of the machine. Leaving the cotton harvester on, he jumped down to investigate.

Standing in front of the machine, he saw a spindle hitting the head cover. Spindles are very sharp cone-shaped pieces of metal inside the head unit. They pull cotton off the plant by turning very fast. A head is covered except where the cotton enters the machine. Therefore, the spindles are partially exposed. It is at this spot where the cotton harvester operator stood and saw the spindles hitting the head cover.

Unsure how, his left hand or sleeve suddenly became caught in the turning spindles, and his arm was pulled into the machine. He screamed. Co-workers came running. Luckily, the cotton harvester operator pulled his arm out from the turning spindles. His fifth finger was dangling, while his arm was mangled and covered in blood.

How could this injury have been prevented?

- Workers should never place any part of their body in or near running equipment.
- Old cotton harvesters should be equipped with new safety devices that shut the power off when the operator leaves the cab.

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.