

Nectarine Picker Injures Neck in Ladder Fall¹

California NURSE Project²

SUMMARY: CASE 193-368-01

A nectarine picker was busy picking in the orchard. When his basket was full he would empty it in a bin on the ground. This meant going up and down the tripod ladder often. A tripod ladder has a single pole on one side which supports a set of ladder steps on the other. When emptying his basket, fruit on the ground would stick to the bottom of his boots.

The nectarine picker started climbing down the ladder to empty his basket. Suddenly, his boot slipped off a step. He began falling when his foot hooked on a step. This flipped him upside down, smashing his head on the ground and bending his neck forward. He hung upside down.

Co-workers released the nectarine picker's foot and lowered him to the ground. Then they moved him so a tractor could pass by. It took one half hour to find their supervisor to get instructions on what to do with the injured worker. Finally, the nectarine picker was loaded into a van and taken to a hospital.

How could this injury have been prevented?

- Work crews should be trained not to move an injured worker, especially one with a possible neck or spinal injury.
- Employers should have written safety programs. These programs can help workers and supervisors identify hazards such as fruit on boot soles.
- Supervisors and workers should call 911 if someone has a severe injury.

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.