

## Lightening Strikes Kill Two Field Workers<sup>1</sup>

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California NURSE Project<sup>2</sup>

### **SUMMARY : CASES 291-003-01, 291-003-02, 291-009-01, 291-009-02, 291-009-03**

Lightning strikes killed two farm workers who were picking and hoeing lettuce during a thunderstorm. They worked on crews about fifteen miles apart. One crew was leaving the field because of the lightning, when one of the last workers out was struck by a lightning bolt. He died immediately of a heart attack.

The second crew had taken shelter in a bus during the storm, but when the rain stopped they returned to the field. A worker was bent over hoeing lettuce when he was struck. The lightning strikes continued, and paramedics had trouble reaching the worker and getting him to the ambulance. The worker died in the hospital from burns.

How could these deaths have been prevented?

- The foremen should have stopped work during a lightning storm which spread over many miles. Both foremen attempted to work during some part of the storm.
- One person cannot judge dangerous weather conditions. Foremen should use portable weather radios or the cable weather channel.
- Both workers had immediate heart attacks when struck by lightning. Every field work crew should have one person certified in 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

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1. This document, CDHS(COHP)-FI-92-005-04, 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.