

## Foot Amputated by Auger<sup>1</sup>

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California NURSE Program<sup>2</sup>

### SUMMARY : CASE 292-009-01

At a vegetable processing plant, a machine operator's foot was amputated while walking down a trimming line. On the trimming line the vegetables are cut to size, and the trimmings are dumped into a trough that runs along the floor. Inside the trough a metal auger turns like a screw, pushing the vegetable matter out of the trimming area. The trough is covered with heavy grates. Somehow, one of the grates covering the trough was not in place and the machine operator stepped or slipped into the turning auger, tearing off the left foot and ankle. The machine operator is not certain how the injury happened, and nobody was watching. Co-workers, and then the fire department, arrived quickly, stopping the machine and applying a tourniquet. The injured machine operator's foot was too badly mangled for the hospital to surgically reattach it.

How could this injury have been prevented?

- The guard over the moving auger should not be easy to remove.
- The auger can be made of a lighter, more flexible material than metal, such as rubber or plastic, which will give way when a person's hand or foot becomes trapped.
- Contact switches can be connected to the grate so that if the grate is raised the power to the auger will switch off.
- Running water, rather than an auger, can be used to carry vegetable matter down the trough.

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.