

Tractor Driver Crushed Between Two Tractors¹

California NURSE Project²

SUMMARY : CASE 192-129-01

At an onion harvest, a worker was driving a tractor which pulled trailers loaded with onions out of the fields. When he arrived at work, his tractor would not start. This was a 15-20 year-old tractor. The driver hooked his tractor to another tractor with a chain to jump start it. Another driver towed the old tractor.

When his tractor started running, the driver let in the clutch and walked between the two tractors to unhook the chain. The old tractor engine was running roughly and shaking. The shift lever was shaken loose and the clutch engaged. The old tractor powered forward on its own and pinned the driver against the back of the other tractor, crushing his spine and pelvis and eventually killing him.

How could this death have been prevented?

- Give workers equipment that works and is properly maintained. An old tractor that won't start is a hazard on the job.
- Employers should have a safety program that trains workers and tells them about dangers on the job.
- Workers should not put themselves into dangerous situations. The driver stood between two running tractors to unhook the chain.
- Work as a team. The other tractor driver might have been able to warn his partner if he had been watching out for him.

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.