

## Plum Picker Breaks Ankle in Ladder Fall<sup>1</sup>

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California NURSE Project<sup>2</sup>

### SUMMARY : CASE 192-163-01

A farm labor contractor was hired to pick a plum orchard as quickly as possible. The field supervisor was in such a hurry that he skipped the usual morning safety meeting and sent the crew straight to work. The supervisor then left the field, without watching to see if the workers were picking safely.

Plums are often picked from ten foot ladders which weigh about 25 pounds. Each worker moves his ladder from place to place under a tree to easily reach plums. For one worker, this was his first day on the job. Standing on one of the top steps of a ladder, he reached for some plums that were beyond his reach. He lost his balance and fell off the ladder, hitting the ground eight feet below. The ladder fell on top of him and broke his ankle.

The only person trained in first aid was the field supervisor, who had left the orchard. The foreman put the injured worker in the back of his pickup truck and drove him to the hospital. At the hospital, the worker's ankle was put in a splint. He was still wearing the splint and out of work at the time of this investigation.

How could this injury have been prevented?

- Train all employees in work methods, whether full-time or seasonal. Do not allow workers to begin work without any safety training.
- All workers, including supervisors and foremen, should be trained in how to handle emergency situations; for example, calling 911 instead of moving the injured person.

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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