

Leg Partly Severed by Forklift Prong¹

California NURSE Project²

SUMMARY : CASE 292-260-01

In a lettuce cooling plant boxes of lettuce are stacked on forklift pallets. A forklift driver moves the stack of boxes to a tilt machine which removes the pallets. In the tilt machine the boxes are turned on their side and the forklift pallets slide free. Then the forklift driver puts his forklift prongs in grooves under the stack, scoops the boxes up and loads them into a truck.

When a tilt machine operator tilted a stack of boxes, two boxes came loose and fell into the grooves under the stack. The operator climbed down to put the boxes back in place. Meanwhile, a forklift driver was driving up to the stack of boxes, ready to scoop them up. The forklift driver drove straight into the tilt machine operator, striking him with a prong behind his left knee. The operator lost a great deal of blood, but alert co-workers gave first aid and quickly called the paramedics.

How could this injury have been prevented?

- Use a stop light or other warning device in the plant to alert forklift drivers when another worker is in the work area.
- Have constant communication between the forklift driver and the tilt machine operator.
- Train workers in safe work methods. This plant did not have a written safety program.

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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