

Tractor Driver Knocked Off Tractor By Tree Branch¹

California NURSE Project²

SUMMARY: CASE 192-548-01

A tractor driver was pulling a discer through an apricot orchard. A discer is made of two rows of round metal blades that the tractor drags through the soil. The driver looked over his shoulder to check the discer. As he turned to face forward again, a low tree branch hit him on the head and knocked him off the tractor.

The driver fell between the back of the tractor and the discer. The tractor was still pulling the discer forward. The driver rolled as far out of the way as he could. A blade of the discer caught his forearm and cut it to the bone. Luckily, the tractor ran into a tree and stalled, so the blade was not pulled all the way across the driver's arm.

He did not have a phone or radio to call for help. Also, he was working alone. The driver walked to a house about a quarter mile away, where he called for an ambulance.

How could this injury have been prevented?

- Trim branches along orchard rows before driving a tractor down the rows.
- Tractors should have a rollover protective structure (ROPS) and seat belts.
- Tractors should have a cage to protect the driver from branches.
- Workers should have a telephone or radio to call for help.

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