

Arm Caught in Mechanical Cotton Picker¹

California NURSE Project²

SUMMARY: CASE 192-549-01

A mechanical cotton picker was stopped in a field. The machine driver and his foreman were cleaning the machine's spindles. These spindles pull the cotton off the plant and into the machine. They get clogged with cotton leaves and twigs. To clean them, spindle covers must be lifted off the spindles. On top of the machine are power shafts, running from the engine to the spindles.

The foreman told the driver to start the cotton picker. The driver started the machine, but kept it out of gear. This meant that the spindles were not turning, but the power shafts were. They noticed a spindle cover was loose. The driver climbed up on the machine to bolt it down. The driver's sweater sleeve became caught in one of the turning power shafts. The sleeve wrapped around the shaft and cut into his arm, almost taking it off. He spent two weeks in the hospital, and his arm has permanent nerve and muscle damage.

How could this injury have been prevented?

- Never work around unguarded power shafts.
- Fit equipment with necessary safety devices, including guards for power shafts.
- Employees should not be asked to place themselves in dangerous positions.

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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