

## **Farm Worker Burned in Explosion<sup>1</sup>**

---

California NURSE Project<sup>2</sup>

### **SUMMARY: CASE 193-208-01**

A farm worker told the following story. He was fixing a tomato harvester in the shop area of a farm. The farm owner (his boss) came by and told him to burn some boxes full of empty containers. To do so, he was to pour gasoline over the boxes out in a field. Burning was not a usual job for the worker. He had been an irrigator, tractor driver and service person, but he had never burned anything at work. He noticed the containers used to hold liquid pesticides. Still, he went out to a field and threw a match on the boxes after pouring gasoline on them.

Seconds later the boxes exploded. Standing about three feet away, blistering burns covered the worker's face, arms and neck from the flames. He ran back to the shop in horrible pain. His boss poured cool water over the burns. This did not help the pain, so the worker asked his boss to drive him to the doctor.

At a medical clinic, a doctor cleaned the burns and gave the injured worker pain control medication. He then requested the injured worker go to the burn unit of a trauma center for more treatment. The farm owner drove him to the nearest trauma center.

How could this injury have been prevented?

- Employers should not have workers do jobs they are not trained to do.
- Plastic pesticide containers should not be burned.
- Employers should not have workers work in unsafe work environments.

- Workers and employers should call 911 if someone is injured.

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.

---

1. This document, CDHS(COHB)-FI-93-005-29, was extracted from a series of the Nurses Using Rural Sentinel Events (NURSE) project, 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. Publication Date: October 1993.

2. NURSE Project, California Occupational Health Program, 2151 Berkeley Way, Annex 11, Berkeley, CA 94704