

Hot Radiator Fluid Scorches Forklift Operator¹

California NURSE Project²

SUMMARY: CASE 193-378-01

A forklift driver was moving boxes at a raisin packaging plant. The forklift he was driving was rented. It kept losing radiator fluid out the radiator overflow hose, so every few hours he added water.

Suddenly, the radiator cap blew off his forklift. Hot radiator fluid scorched the skin on his back and arm. He jumped off the forklift and bruised his right leg. A co-worker quickly poured cold water over the burned forklift driver. Then a supervisor drove him to the doctor.

An ambulance immediately moved him to the burn unit at another medical center. He spent 13 days in the hospital with 20% total body burns.

How could this injury have been prevented?

- Employers should provide ongoing forklift safety training to workers. This training should include how to handle minor mechanical problems.
- Workers should report equipment malfunctions to supervisors.
- Workers and employers should call 911 if someone has a burn injury.

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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