



The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)

Promoting productive workplaces  
through safety and health research



# Three Electrocuted on Farm in Georgia

FACE 86-06

## Introduction:

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), Division of Safety Research (DSR) is currently conducting the Fatal Accident Circumstances and Epidemiology (FACE) Project, which is focusing primarily upon selected electrical-related and confined space-related fatalities. By scientifically collecting data from a sample of fatal accidents, it will be possible to identify and rank factors that influence the risk of fatal injuries for selected employees.

On October 18, 1985, three men (the owner and two employees) on a small farm were moving a grain auger when it contacted a 7200 volt power line. All three workers were electrocuted. THIS INCIDENT IS ALMOST IDENTICAL TO FACE-86-7.

## Contacts/Activities:

Officials of the Georgia Department of Human Resources notified DSR of these fatalities and requested technical assistance. This case has been included in the FACE Project. A research team (a medical officer and a research industrial hygienist) met with the local sheriff at his office and discussed the triple fatality. The sheriff requested that "no investigation" of the site be conducted for reasons that were not explained. The manager of the local power company was interviewed. The sheriff and the manager of the power company provided minimal information.

## Background/Overview of Employer's Safety Program:

The farm (less than 200 acres) is a small family operation, employing two or three extra workers at harvest time. The owner of the farm (a 61-year-old male) usually worked the farm with his son. At the time of the accident two extra workers (a 21-year-old male and a 49-year-old male) were hired on a part-time basis. The farm had no written safety policy.

## Synopsis of Events:

On October 18, 1985, at approximately 8:00 a.m. two farm workers and the owner were moving a portable grain auger when the accident occurred. The auger is approximately 50 feet long, has inflatable-type car tires, and weighs several hundred pounds. The auger can be raised or lowered by a hand crank that is attached to a steel cable pulley system. Common practice for moving the auger is to have it lowered for stability (with the auger in the raised position it is unstable). The auger was to be moved from a grain bin, which is approximately 30 feet high to a different location to load grain on a

truck. To move the auger it must be raised higher to allow the top flap to clear the bin and allow the bottom to telescope out of the ground loading ditch. It is estimated that the auger was raised to a height of 35 feet to enable the workers to back it away from the dryer bin. The workmen were positioned around the rear of the auger to move it to the new location.

The workmen lifted the rear of the auger and pulled it back approximately 15 feet from the grain bin. At this point the auger was on a 45° angle. The workmen then swiveled the rear of the auger 90° to allow a straight path to the truck that was to be loaded with grain. However, approximately 40 yards straight ahead of the auger (at an elevation of 25 feet) was a 7200 volt power line. As the workmen pushed the auger forward, it went between the 7200 volt primary and the neutral, contacting the primary line. All three workers were electrocuted.

## Cause of Death:

The coroner's report is not available at this time.

## Recommendations/Discussion:

**Recommendation #1: Employers should identify safety hazards that may be encountered on the farm.**

**Discussion:** A survey of the farm should be completed that identifies hazards. These hazards should be discussed with the workmen (i.e., the location of overhead power lines, etc.). Necessary precautions should be stressed to all farm personnel.

**Recommendation #2: Employers should stress safe movement of farm equipment.**

**Discussion:** Equipment that is moved to different locations on the farm may present a safety hazard, especially when moved under power lines. All equipment (augers) should be lowered to a safe transporting position before being moved from one location to another.

[Return to In-house FACE reports](#)

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