



The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)

Promoting productive workplaces
through safety and health research



Two Electrocuted on Farm in Georgia

FACE 86-07

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 14, 1985, workmen on a large farm were in the process of moving a grain auger when it contacted a 7200 volt power line. Two workers were electrocuted and three other workers were injured. THIS INCIDENT IS ALMOST IDENTICAL TO FACE-86-6.

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) visited the site of this double fatality in cooperation with the local county sheriff. A meeting was held with the local sheriff and the research team visited the accident site accompanied by a deputy. An interview was conducted with the farm operator and a farm worker. The site was photographed by the NIOSH team.

Background/Overview of Employer's Safety Program:

The 10,000 acre farm is leased by a local farmer and employs from 4 to 8 workers, depending on the season and the crop to be planted or harvested. One of the victims (a 39-year-old male) had been employed at the farm for approximately 8 years. The other victim (a 30-year-old male) had worked for the farm operator previously; however, this was his first day back to work for the farm operator.

The farm operator has no written safety policy. Safety is left up to common sense among the farm workers.

Synopsis of Events:

On October 14, 1985, at approximately 10:00 a.m. five farm workers were in the process of moving a portable grain auger when the accident occurred. The auger is approximately 60 feet long, is mounted on 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 the grain drying bin, which is approximately 30 feet high, to a different location. To move the auger it had to be raised to allow the top flap to clear the bin and to 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 five 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° and began pushing the auger to the new location. However, approximately 30 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 over the 7200 volt primary, contacting the line. Two workmen were electrocuted and the other three workmen were injured.

It was reported that the three workers, who survived the incident, were wearing new rubber soled shoes and that the two workers, who were killed, were wearing leather shoes in poor condition.

Cause of Death:

No autopsies were performed. Cause of death for both victims was listed as electrocution.

Recommendations/Discussion:

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

Discussion: A survey of the farm that identifies hazards should be completed. 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.

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Partly

No