



The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)

Promoting productive workplaces
through safety and health research



25-Year-Old Restaurant Manager Electrocuted in North Carolina

FACE 86-43

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. The purpose of the FACE program is to identify and rank factors that influence the risk of fatal injuries for selected employees.

On August 3, 1986, a manager of a restaurant was cleaning the floor of the kitchen, when he came into contact with a refrigerator that had a ground fault and he was electrocuted. The restaurant was closed and the restaurant manager's wife and two year-old daughter were waiting in the dining area for him to finish.

Contacts/Activities:

Officials of the Occupational Safety and Health Program for the State of North Carolina notified DSR concerning this fatality and requested technical assistance. This case has been included in the FACE Project. On August 26, 1986, a DSR epidemiologist and a safety engineer conducted a site visit, met with the owner of the restaurant, interviewed the next-of-kin, interviewed a representative from a control restaurant, and photographed the accident site.

Overview of Employer's Safety Program:

This fatality occurred at a small specialty restaurant that employs fifteen workers. The restaurant is opened for business only on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays and was for sale at the time of the accident. The manager was cleaning the restaurant in preparation of a visit by a prospective buyer.

The employer did not have a formalized safety program.

Synopsis of Events:

On August 3, 1986, a manager of a restaurant was cleaning the floor of the kitchen, when the accident occurred. The restaurant was closed and the restaurant manager's wife and two year-old daughter were waiting in the dining area for him to finish.

The victim, who was wearing tennis shoes, had put soap and water on the floor and was walking towards the dining area when he slipped and fell. As he fell, he tried to catch himself and he grabbed the handle of a commercial refrigerator nearby. The refrigerator had a ground fault and was not grounded (the cord did not have a ground prong). The ground fault apparently was the result of excessive wear on the insulation of the conductors that supplied electricity to the compressor unit. These conductors were exposed at a cutout hole in the case of the refrigerator, were not protected from abrasion, and were not protected by strain relief.

The victim's wife responded to the noise in the kitchen and tried to separate the victim from the refrigerator. She was shocked, but was able to separate the victim from the refrigerator and drag him into the dining area. She started CPR and contacted the father of the victim (the owner of the restaurant), who called the emergency medical service (EMS). The EMS responded approximately ten minutes after being contacted; however, the time interval between the accident and notification of the EMS could not be determined.

Cause of Death:

Not available at this time.

Recommendations/Discussion:

Recommendation #1: All electrical equipment (such as refrigerators) should be designed and maintained to comply with all applicable requirements of the National Electrical Code.

Discussion: The refrigerator involved in this accident was not grounded, had exposed conductors, and did not have strain relief provided for the cord. Additionally, the conductors were not protected from abrasion at the cutout hole. These conditions apparently developed over time and were not recognized as hazardous. The refrigerator was bought used and the owner did not have the owner's manual.

Recommendation #2: Restaurant owners and managers should be encouraged to conduct formalized safety training for all restaurant employees.

Discussion: The hazards to which restaurant employees are exposed are often not recognized by owners and employees because of the similarity to home kitchens and familiarity with many of the tasks performed. However, the severity of these hazards increases because of the increased level of activity and the commercial nature of the operation.

Recommendation #3: All electrical receptacles in kitchen areas of restaurants should be protected by ground fault circuit interrupter breakers or receptacles.

Discussion: NIOSH ALERT (85-104), "Request for Assistance in Preventing Electrocutions of Workers in Fast Food Restaurants" (December, 1984), – recommends that GFCIs be installed in the areas where electricity and wetness coexist (i.e., kitchens in restaurants).

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Not helpful

Very helpful