

Public Health

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To: Carl Spurlock, PhD, Director, Kentucky Injury Prevention and Research Center

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Subject: Farmer Dies in Cornpicker

SUMMARY

On 22 November 1995, a 52-year-old farmer died when he was caught in the cornpicker he was operating. He was a full-time farmer and had been involved in the family farming business all of his life. On the day of the incident, the victim and his 20-year-old son had been working in the field together operating the cornpicker. After obtaining a full load, the son transported the load back for storage while the farmer stayed in the field to finish a small section of corn. When he did not return home at the expected time, his wife and son went looking for him. They found him entangled in the rotating shaft of the cornpicking machine. The victim's neck had been broken and he was pronounced dead at the scene. There were no witnesses to the incident. In order to prevent similar incidents from occurring, FACE investigators recommend:

- Turn off equipment and allow time for parts to stop moving before making adjustments
- Wear clothing that is close fitting, with no loose or frayed ends, when working near machinery with moving parts
- Follow appropriate procedures and safety precautions given in the operator's manual

INTRODUCTION

On Wednesday, 22 November, 1995, a 52-year-old male farmer was killed when he became caught in the moving shaft of the cornpicking machine he was operating. FACE investigators

were informed of the incident by the Occupational Health Nurses in Agricultural Communities

(OHNAC) nurse in the area where the incident occurred and an investigation was initiated. On December 6, a site visit was conducted. The victim's wife and son were interviewed at their home. His brother accompanied the investigator to the site to photograph the equipment and area. Interviews were also conducted with the county coroner, state police, emergency medical services personnel, and a farm implement dealer, all of whom had been present at the scene. Copies of photographs of the scene taken by the coroner were obtained and viewed. An operator's manual for this piece of equipment was obtained for reference. The victim had been involved in farming all of his life. He was a full-time farmer and lived on the same farmland for 23 years, operating a family-run dairy farm that consisted of 79 acres. Forty head of cattle were milked twice a day. In addition to this farmland, he also rented 150 acres to raise corn, hay and tobacco; most of the corn was used for cattle feed, but some was sold. The rented acreage was located about 10 miles from the dairy farm.

The victim had been diagnosed 12 years ago with dermatomyositis, a disease that primarily affects skeletal muscles, and frequently appears with other rheumatic diseases. He had been prescribed low doses of Deltasone and had not complained of any side-effects from the medication. He did not experience any further problems with the disease since taking the medication or suffer any injuries related to the disease. The family related that he was feeling good on the day of the incident.

INVESTIGATION

On the day of the incident the farmer and his son were working together picking corn. They were using an AVCO New Idea cornpicker, Model 324, manufactured in 1971, attached to a Ford tractor, Model 6700. The farmer had been using this equipment for approximately 10 years. The flexi-finger wheel shafts in the 12-roll husking bed turn at a speed of 63.5 RPM at the standard PTO shaft input speed of 540 RPM. Safety decals on the machine warn operators to keep hands, feet and clothing away from power-driven parts, to disengage power before cleaning when the machine becomes clogged, and to keep off implement unless seat or platform is provided.

The two men began work about 11am the day of the incident. The weather was clear and cool that day. At approximately 4pm, the farmer asked his son to take a full load of corn to their dairy farm for storage and then start the milking. The farmer planned to finish picking a small section of corn before returning home to the dairy farm to assist with the milking. When it began to get dark and the victim had still not returned from the field, his wife and son went looking for him. They arrived at the field at about 6:30pm and found

that he had pulled the tractor, cornpicker and gravity bed beside his truck. The tractor and elevator were still running and the lights on the equipment had not been turned on. They found him wrapped around a shaft of the ear forwarder in the husking bed of the cornpicker. A mobile phone was used to call 911. The state police, emergency medical services and the county coroner responded to the call. An equipment dealer who was just getting off work heard about the call on his CB radio and voluntarily responded to assist in removing the victim from the equipment.

Although there were no witnesses to the incident, the family speculates that the victim went to see if the husking bed was empty, leaving the equipment running, as he usually did.

As he stood up on the equipment and reached across the husking bed near the rotating shaft of the ear forwarder that moves the corn through the husking bed, his jacket, which was unzipped, likely became caught in the moving parts. As the shaft continued to rotate it pulled his arms and upper torso under and around the shaft, breaking his neck.

At this point the slip clutch broke and the shaft did not rotate further. The exact time of death is not known

but since the tractor lights had not been turned on it was probably still light out and not long

after the son had left the field. The coroner pronounced the victim dead at 7:58pm.

CAUSE OF DEATH

The cause of death as listed on the death certificate is fractured neck.

RECOMMENDATIONS/DISCUSSION

Recommendation #1: Turn off equipment and allow time for parts to stop moving before making adjustments.

Discussion: The operator's manual for this equipment and safety stickers present on the equipment state that adjustments to the machine should never be attempted while the machine is in operation.

Recommendation #2: Wear clothing that is close-fitting, with no loose or frayed ends, when working near machinery with moving parts.

Discussion: Wearing clothing that is well-fitted can help prevent entanglement in moving parts of equipment. Clothing should be zipped and buttoned, not open. Frayed clothing, jackets and sweatshirts with drawstrings, and boots or shoes with long laces should be avoided when working with machinery.

Recommendation #3: Follow appropriate procedures and safety precautions given in the

operator's manual.

Discussion: All operating instructions should be read and followed for safe operation of equipment. Instructions contain specific guidelines and safety precautions to follow during operation or repair of the equipment. Being aware of correct procedures and hazards of the equipment can help prevent injury.

REFERENCES

Operator's Manual (No.P-211), No. 327 Husking Unit (For Nos. 324 and 325 Gathering Units); New Idea Farm Equipment: Coldwater, OH.

Physicians' Desk Reference, 49th Edition, 1995; Medical Economics Data Production Company: Montvale, NJ.

Snyder K, Bobick T. Safe Grain and Silage Handling. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH); October 1995.