

Harvest Machinery

Many severe injuries to agricultural workers involve harvest machinery. Missing guards and shields, failure to recognize hazards, and careless operation of machinery often contribute to harvesting equipment accidents.

Manufacturers attempt to build safety features into equipment. But that's not enough. You need to establish a timely maintenance program to keep harvesting equipment in safe condition.

TRUE STORY

A farm worker was driving a mechanical fig harvester in an orchard to sweep figs off the ground. A conveyor belt carried the figs past a big fan that blew dirt and leaves from the figs. A metal cover guarded the metal fan; however, the fan exhaust outlet was not guarded.

As the worker stood in front of the exhaust outlet so that it would blow dirt and dust off his clothing, he placed his foot inside the exhaust outlet and accidentally made contact with the fan's blades. The rotating blades caught his foot and amputated it.

A co-worker turned off the harvester and a nearby foreman called 911 from his mobile phone. Paramedics rushed the injured worker to the hospital, but his foot was too mangled for surgeons to reattach it.

What could have prevented this accident?

- Use machinery only for its designed purpose and only after completing safety training.
- Design and place guard covers over the exhaust fan outlet to prevent employees from coming into contact with rotating fans.

2 Keys to Safety: Maintenance and Alertness

Prevent harvest machinery accidents by focusing on proper maintenance and employee alertness.

- **Maintenance.** A planned maintenance program can minimize downtime and reduce injuries during the harvest. Complete pre-season maintenance and repair several weeks before harvest time.
- **Employee alertness.** Fatigue, drowsiness, and illness are prime contributors to harvest injuries. Periodic breaks minimize the monotony and fatigue of machine operations.

EMPLOYER/EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES

Employer:

- Develop rules to operate and maintain harvesting equipment.

- Train employees on the driving characteristics of each harvesting machine.
- Provide personal protective clothing and equipment appropriate for the work, including hard hats, safety glasses, face shields, hearing protection and dust masks or respirators.
- Supervise harvesting equipment operators continually.
- Ensure all guards, shields and safety signs are properly installed on harvesting equipment.
- Review maintenance records periodically to verify that harvesting equipment is properly serviced to eliminate hazards.

Employee:

- Know the operating characteristics of harvesting equipment. Review each machine's operations manual.
- Never modify or remove any safety features of harvesting equipment.
- Always buckle your seat belts and/or restraints before you operate the equipment.
- Keep others away from the operating area.
- Never use attachments unless specifically authorized by the harvester's manufacturer.
- Lower raised harvester components to the ground and set the parking brakes before dismounting.
- Turn off the engine, cycle hydraulic controls and remove the ignition key before leaving harvester unattended.
- Never allow children to play on or around machinery.
- Wear all protective clothing and equipment issued to you by your supervisor.
- Turn off harvester engine when refueling, and don't smoke.
- Use harvester's hand grips to dismount. Never jump from harvester when dismounting.
- Shut off power before you try to dislodge or clear clogged equipment parts by hand.
- Wear comfortable close-fitting clothing, including appropriate protective footwear.
- Never operate equipment when under the influence of alcohol, illegal drugs, or prescription drugs that can cause drowsiness.
- Inspect your harvester daily. Confirm that all guards and shields are secure and in place.
- Report missing shields, machine damage, unusual vibration or noise to a supervisor immediately.

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