

Packing House Safety

Agricultural packing houses have many gears, belts, rollers, and other moving machinery. Failure to work carefully around this machinery can cause serious injury or death. For example, packing house employees can suffer severe crushing and amputation injuries when they attempt to remove jams, or when they perform unauthorized repairs to machinery. Understanding and following packing house rules and regulations can prevent such accidents.

TRUE STORY

In an apple packing house, a worker was using a sorting belt to remove large apples from the belt and put them in shipping boxes. When an apple was caught between the conveyor belts, the worker tried to remove it by reaching under the machine's guard. As she attempted to maneuver her hand and arm through the moving parts of the belt, her arm was pulled in and fractured in three places. The rotating belt peeled the skin off her forearm.

What could have prevented this accident?

- Never try to correct jams or repair machinery without authorization.
- Never bypass safety guards.
- Place warning labels on machinery to alert employees of danger.

How to Keep a Packing House Safe

- Inspect packing house machinery periodically to identify hazards. Train employees to spot hazards and report them to a supervisor immediately.
- Keep all machine guards in place.
- Packing houses have lots of traffic. Employees should avoid loading, receiving, and dumping areas unless assigned to work there.
- Train employees in proper lifting procedures.

EMPLOYER/EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES

Employer:

- Guard packing house equipment well, and use warning labels to help employees identify hazards.
- Set and enforce policies on safe attire in a packing house, such as closed-toe shoes, snug fitting clothing, and hair restraints.

- Develop a system to inspect packing house equipment and machinery periodically.
- Forbid employees to perform unauthorized work on machinery.
- Develop rules for proper operation and maintenance of packing house equipment.
- Develop a lockout/ tagout program.
- Train employees in the operating characteristics of packing house equipment.
- Provide employees with personal protective equipment such as hard hats, safety glasses, face shields, and hearing protection.
- Provide a designated area for employees to take breaks.

Employee:

- Inspect machinery for unsafe conditions before starting your shift. Check for loose or missing guards, worn belts, etc. Report unsafe conditions to a supervisor immediately.
- Wear proper clothing as required by your employer.
- Never try to correct hazards without authorization.
- Never get on, start, or handle any forklift or other equipment unless authorized.
- Never hitch a ride on forklifts or other equipment.
- Know the location of the nearest off switch to your workstation. Keep your work area neat, and discard all waste in trash containers. Pick up all produce from the floor.
- Keep your hands free and clear of all belts, rollers, or other moving equipment.
- Use care when walking on wet floors. Hold handrails on stairs.
- Never wear loose or floppy clothing or jewelry that can get caught in belts, rollers, or other moving equipment.
- Always wear personal protective equipment issued by your employer.
- Avoid drugs and alcohol at work. Check prescription drugs to assure they don't cause drowsiness.
- See your supervisor immediately if you're uncertain about a job task, or how to operate packing house equipment.

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