

FATALITY NARRATIVE

Hop Yard Laborer Struck by Hop Pole

Industry: Hop farm
Task: Harvesting hops
Occupation: Farm laborer
Type of Incident: Struck by

Incident Date: September 21, 2014
Release Date: June 29, 2015
SHARP Report No.: 71-138-2015
Case No.: 14WA005701



Top-cutter harvester machine cutting hop vines that then drop onto a truck. The photo was taken at the incident hop yard.

On September 21, 2014, a 33-year-old hop-farm laborer was fatally injured when he was struck on the head by a falling hop pole. He was a seasonal hop-farm laborer who had been working at his employer's farm for three weeks during the hop harvest. On the day of the incident he was working with a field crew and serving as a side tender. He was preparing the trucks as they approached and departed the harvesting operation in the field. The hop vines were trellised on vertical ropes suspended from horizontal wires that were secured to the tops of 18-foot poles. The harvesting procedure involved a bottom-cutter, (a tractor with a cutting implement) which cut the bottom of the vines, followed by a top-cutter harvester machine that cut the top of the vines. As the vines were cut, they fell into a truck that was in front of the top-cutter. The victim's job, among other

duties, was to vertically insert 3-foot pieces of PVC pipe into pegs mounted on either side of the front of the truck, so that as the truck moved forward the vines were guided inward into the truck bed before being cut. When the truck was full, he would remove the pieces of pipe and place them on the next truck. He was walking next to the top-cutter. The top-cutter operator had warned the victim to not walk beside the machine as it was moving. The employer required field crew members working the harvest to wear hard hats. The victim was not wearing a hard hat. The top-cutter operator noticed that a pole was falling and yelled "pole!" The victim was hit on the head by the falling pole. It is not known whether the top-cutter struck the pole. The victim was taken to a hospital where he died four days later.

Requirements

Personal Protective Equipment

- Employers must provide personal protective equipment when appropriate and ensure that employees use that equipment.
See [WAC 296-307-10005\(1\)](#).

Training

- Provide employee safety education and training programs which include information about agricultural hazards and safe work practices.
See [WAC 296-307-018\(6\)](#).

Accident Prevention Program

- Develop a written accident prevention program tailored to the needs of your agricultural operation and the types of hazards involved.
See [WAC 296-307-030\(2\)](#).

Recommendations

Hop harvest field crew

- Stay clear of all harvesting equipment and trucks. Walk well ahead of the truck and in an adjacent row.
- Make sure the harvesting equipment operator and truck driver know where you are at all times by staying in their line of sight.
- Wear a hard hat and high-visibility safety vest.

Statewide Statistics: This was number 61 of 73 work-related fatalities in Washington State during 2014, and was number 6 of 6 agriculture-related fatalities.

This narrative was developed to alert employers and employees of a tragic loss of life of a worker in Washington State and is based on preliminary data ONLY and does not represent final determinations regarding the nature of the incident or conclusions regarding the cause of the fatality. Developed by WA State Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) Program and the Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH), WA State Dept. of Labor & Industries. The FACE Program is supported in part by a grant from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH grant# 5 U60 OH008487-09). For more information, contact the Safety and Health Assessment and Research for Prevention (SHARP) Program. 1-888-667-4277.