



# FATALITY NARRATIVE

## Nursery Laborer Electrocuted When Irrigation Pipe Contacts Overhead Power Line \*

**Industry:** Grape vineyard nursery  
**Task:** Moving irrigation pipes  
**Occupation:** Nursery laborer  
**Type of Incident:** Electrocution

**Release Date:** June 7, 2011  
**Incident Date:** August 6, 2009  
**Case No.:** 09WA03601  
**SHARP Report No.:** 71-101-2011

On August 6, 2009, a nursery laborer was electrocuted when an irrigation pipe he was holding contacted an overhead power line. The 27-year-old victim was employed as a laborer at a vineyard nursery. The victim was moving sections of aluminum irrigation pipes in order to set up irrigation lines at a young vineyard; a task he had been performing for the last three months. The victim noticed that a section of aluminum pipe measuring 4 inches in diameter by 24.5 feet long was clogged with dirt. The employer had trained this and other employees to unclog dirt from irrigation pipe sections by connecting the pipe to the water main and using water pressure to blow out the dirt. He then picked up the pipe and started to knock the dirt loose inside the pipe by hitting it on the ground. The pipe contacted a 7200 volt overhead power line that was 19 feet above the ground, causing the victim to be electrocuted.



### Requirements

- ! Employers of agricultural workers must ensure that proper clearance and safeguards are used to protect employees working near overhead power lines. See [WAC 296-307](#).
- ! Upending irrigation pipe within one hundred feet of overhead conductors is prohibited. See [WAC 296-307-15006\(3\)](#).
- ! Employers must instruct all employees in irrigation pipe safe working practices at the beginning of employment. See [WAC 296-307\(1\)](#).
- ! Ensure that irrigation pipe safety procedures are covered in the written accident prevention program. See [WAC 296-307-030\(2\)](#).

### Recommendations

- Employers should develop and enforce standard operating procedures that irrigation pipes should not be elevated vertically while being moved under overhead power lines.
- Employers should train workers to recognize the dangers of electrocution from irrigation pipes making contact with overhead power lines.
- Employers should conduct a hazard assessment before starting and during work activities to determine if workers are at risk of electrocution from overhead power lines or other electrical hazards.
- Employers should consider using plastic or other non-conductive pipes whenever possible.
- When cleaning or moving irrigation pipe watch out for overhead power lines. Look up and live!
- Hazards aren't just overhead. Before you dig a pipe installation site, contact the local utility companies to mark the location of all of the underground utilities.

**State Wide Statistics:** This was number 33 out of 65 work-related fatalities in Washington State during 2009, and was number 5 out of 8 agriculture-related fatalities.

*\*This bulletin 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 Washington State [Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation \(FACE\)](#) 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 \(NIOSH\)](#). For more information, contact the [Safety and Health Assessment and Research for Prevention \(SHARP\) Program](#), 1-888-667-4277.



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