

Vineyard Laborer Falls from Grape Harvester

INCIDENT FACTS

REPORT #: 71-187-2019s

REPORT DATE: October 30, 2019

INCIDENT DATE: September 25, 2018

VICTIM: 55 years old

INDUSTRY: Grape vineyards

OCCUPATION: Vineyard laborer

SCENE: Grape vineyard

EVENT TYPE: Fall from equipment



A 55-year-old vineyard laborer was injured when he fell seven feet from a grape harvester.

The incident happened during harvest of wine grapes at the employer's vineyard.

The mechanical harvester was designed to be pulled by a tractor as it moves through vineyard rows. It beats the vines with rubber sticks, causing the grapes to drop onto a conveyor belt that brings them to a holding bin.

The employer modified this harvester by attaching a chair to the harvester's conveyor. The laborer had sat in this chair for five seasons to pick out and discard material other than grapes (known as MOG), such as vines and leaves as the harvester moved through the vineyard rows.

The manufacturer did not approve this modification. The harvester operator's manual cautions that no one should ride on the harvester while it is moving, as this may result in serious injury or death.

Just before the incident, the laborer and the harvester operator had returned from a break.

The operator started up the tractor to pull the harvester after he saw the laborer get into the chair. As the operator turned away, the laborer stood up from the chair to adjust his rain gear. When the harvester began to go forward, the laborer who was still standing fell backwards off the chair's platform. He landed seven feet below on the ground.

His fall resulted in severe bruising of his chest, neck, and back, as well as shoulder sprains.



Photo 1 Mechanical grape harvester with employer installed and manufacturer unapproved chair.



Photo 2 Chair installed on harvester conveyor used by employees to pick material other than grapes (MOG) from the conveyor. The laborer fell from this chair and landed on the ground seven feet below.



Photo 3 The employer removed the MOG chair after the incident. The red circle indicates where the chair had been positioned on the harvester's conveyor.

Requirements

The manufacturer's instruction manual, if published by the manufacturer and currently available, must be the source of information for the safe operation and maintenance of field equipment.

See [WAC 296-307-076\(2\)](#)

Recommendations

Employers should not modify, install, or retrofit components of equipment without consulting the manufacturer.

This bulletin was developed to alert employers and employees of the injury to 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 injury.

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