Five Reasons to Work Safe Today Fatality Report



A 16-year-old male farm worker (the victim) died in a cotton packing machine after being covered with a load of cotton. Prior to the incident, the victim had been riding with a co-worker who was operating a cotton picker. When the picker was nearly full of cotton, the picker operator stopped and told the victim to walk over to the cotton packing machine and get ready to pack the load while he finished picking. Approximately 30 minutes later, the picker operator drove the fully loaded 240-horsepower picker over to the packing machine. When he arrived at the cotton packing machine he noticed that the tractor used to power it was not running and its lights were not illuminated. He did not see the victim but, thinking the victim had walked to his truck to get some tobacco, drove the picker along the side of the cotton packing machine and dumped the load into it. After he dumped the load, he and the farm owner, who had returned to the packing area after cutting stalks, became concerned when the victim did not return to the cotton packing machine. They began to search for him and when they could not locate him, decided to use the tractor to pull the cotton packing machine forward in order to expose the stack of cotton inside. They found the victim buried in loose cotton within the cotton stack and pulled him out. They found that he had no pulse and was not conscious or breathing. At approximately 10:30 p.m., the farm owner ran to a work truck parked nearby and used a mobile phone to call 911. The co-worker initiated cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). Law-enforcement officers arrived within approximately 10 minutes and took over CPR efforts. EMS arrived within approximately 20 minutes of the 911 call and transported the victim to a local hospital where he was pronounced dead, approximately 2 hours after the incident.

NIOSH investigators concluded that, to help prevent similar occurrences, employers should:

- develop, implement, and enforce a policy that prohibits workers from entering the box of cotton packing machines and that requires a visual inspection of the box and the use of an agreed-upon signaling system prior to dumping cotton into the box.
- develop, implement, and enforce a comprehensive safety program for all workers which includes, but is not limited to, training in hazard identification, avoidance, and abatement.