

Teenage Irrigator's Finger Mangled by Pipe¹

California NURSE Project²

SUMMARY : CASE 192-344-01

A fifteen year-old *irrigator* was taking apart sprinkler lines in a garlic field with another worker. While his partner lifted one section of pipe, making a gap where two sections of pipe were joined, the irrigator grabbed the next section by the gap at its mouth. This time the two sections of pipe were stuck. His partner moved his section to break them free. The young irrigator's hand got caught where the pipes joined. His fingers were cut and broken, and the top of his little finger was almost cut completely off.

The farm did not have a procedure for taking care of injuries. The foreman told the worker's father, who was also working as an irrigator, to take him to a doctor. The father took him to the emergency department of a hospital, where the cuts were stitched. The next day the irrigator's hand was so swollen he could not work. Upon hearing this, the farm owner told the father to take him to a rural medical clinic. The clinic further treated the young irrigator's hand, and sent him to a hand surgeon. At the time of this investigation, it was possible that the young irrigator might still lose his finger.

How could this injury have been prevented?

- Employers should have a safety program that trains workers and tells them about dangers on the job.
- Be ready to respond to injuries, by giving first aid and calling the Emergency Medical Services.

The NURSE (Nurses Using Rural Sentinel Events) project is conducted by the California Occupational Health Program of the California Department of Health Services, in conjunction with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. The program's goal is to prevent occupational injuries associated with agriculture. Injuries are reported by hospitals, emergency medical services, clinics, medical examiners, and coroners. Selected cases are followed up by conducting interviews of injured workers, co-workers, employers, and others involved in the incident. An on-site safety investigation is also conducted. These investigations provide detailed information on the worker, the work environment, and the potential risk factors resulting in the injury. Each investigation concludes with specific recommendations designed to prevent injuries, for the use of employers, workers, and others concerned about health and safety in agriculture.

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