

DEADLY Mistakes

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Fatal Events: On
Nov. 17, 2005, a 48-

year-old farm worker was killed while operating a coldwater pressure washer.

Investigative Findings: The accident occurred on a hog farm that included hog houses, a hog lagoon, an office and a building for employees to shower, secure personal belongings and take breaks. The victim was the primary operator of a pressure washer used to wash the floor and walls in a hog house.

The hog house had a stationary pressure washer resting in a dry location. The washer had a long hose to cover the work area, but because of the length of the hose, water pressure dropped at the end of the hose. So employees often used a portable unit that was brought into the wet area even though it was not designed for wet conditions.

The portable unit was being used by the victim at the time of the accident. The machine parts were not listed and labeled for a wet location, and the three-prong plug for the 240-volt washer needed repairs. There was moisture in the plug housing and in the washer's master control box.

Employee interviews uncovered that the pressure washer overheated frequently, and employees had received electrical shocks before the fatal accident. The pressure washer had been taken out of service, but no problems were discovered and no repairs were made.

The hog houses were designed to be waterproof, but because of missing covers on electrical conduit joints, fixtures and receptacles, water damage had occurred.

At the time of the accident, the employee had plugged the

washer into a receptacle without a ground fault circuit interrupter. The employee also was not wearing personal protective equipment that would shield him from electrical shock.

Discussion: Electrocutions continue to be a leading cause of death on the job. In 2005, eight employees lost their lives to electrocutions. Electrocutions represented the third leading cause of workplace deaths in the state behind falls and struck-by object accidents. The N.C. Department of Labor has jurisdiction on farms with 11 or more employees or a farm of any size with an active temporary labor camp.

Recommendations:

- ✘ Electrical equipment should be free from recognized hazards that could cause death or physical harm.
- ✘ Ground fault circuit interrupters should be used where workers are exposed to humid or wet conditions and come in contact with grounded equipment. Wet or damp locations increase the potential for electrical shock.
- ✘ Any electrical equipment causing a shock should be tagged out from service until the equipment can be repaired or replaced.
- ✘ Employees should be trained in electrical safety work practices.
- ✘ Electrical circuits and equipment must be grounded.
- ✘ Electrical enclosures in damp or wet locations must be installed to prevent moisture or water from entering and accumulating within the enclosure.
- ✘ In wet locations, enclosures should be weatherproof.
- ✘ A hazard assessment should be made to determine if hazards are present that might require the use of personal protective equipment.