Citrus Harvest Stats and Facts

FACTS

1. Orchard workers suffered primarily from back and shoulder musculoskeletal injuries, often related to heavy bags carried up and down the ladders, bending and lifting, and the emphasis on picking as quickly as possible, especially for workers being paid by the piece. Other common injuries include skin problems, most notably from contact with poison ivy. Skin irritation is also caused by pollen and dust, peach fuzz, insects, sun and water exposure, or from chemicals used in the orchard.
2. Even when proper pesticide application and re-entry is observed, residue can cause contact irritation on the skin. Workers thinning, harvesting or pruning trees and fruit are not legally required to wear the personal protective equipment that those mixing or applying chemicals must use. Gloves, hats and other protective equipment can provide a barrier and reduce workers' indirect exposure to chemical sprays.
3. Florida's $1 billion citrus harvest is almost entirely handpicked. Harvesters use 20-foot ladders and canvas bags weighing up to 90 pounds when full to pick about 3 tons of fruit daily. Environmental conditions are challenging. During picking season, the groves are typically wet and humid in the morning and hot and dusty in the afternoon. Harvesters confront eye injuries from tree branches, dust, chemical residues, biting insects, sunlight, and falls.
4. Citrus industry managers recognize that eye injuries are the most frequent causes of clinic visits, and that transportation, lost time, and paperwork contribute significantly to harvesting costs. Eye injuries are preventable by protective eyewear. However, use of safety glasses requires availability, a monetary outlay, adoption by reluctant workers, and a change in workplace safety culture that is difficult to influence and measure.

STATS

- An estimated 1,500 of the 17,000 people who worked in Florida’s citrus growing industry in 1996 suffered work-related injuries or illnesses on the job.
- According to the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries, over 500 orchard workers fall off ladders each year and file claims, with over 200 of them injured so seriously that they are not able to return to picking.
- Work-related musculoskeletal pain (WRMP) among Citrus sinensis farm workers has barely been studied. Yet most work tasks in such farms are manually performed using awkward standing postures that can contribute to WRMP. Aim.
- According to AgInjury News, orchard or vineyard accidents in the U.S. since 2017 included six which involved all-terrain vehicles or utility vehicles. All resulted in fatalities. Many happened as agricultural workers were performing job-related duties using the ATVs, such as checking irrigation or spraying operations or as a part of agritourism operations.
- Tractor rollovers in orchards took the lives of at least five orchard workers since 2017, with rollovers also causing serious but non-fatal injuries as well. Forklift accidents caused two fatalities in orchard settings.