

Hydraulic Oil Plus Oxygen Creates Explosion

Five farm workers were electrocuted in two nearly identical accidents when grain augers they were moving struck live power lines.

The augers are about 50 feet (15 meters) long, have inflatable car tires and weigh several hundred pounds. They can be raised or lowered by a hand crank attached to a steel cable pulley system. Usually the auger is lowered for moving, because when it is in the raised position it is unstable and difficult to control.

In the first incident, two farm workers and the owner were moving the auger from a grain bin to another location to load a grain truck. During the move the auger struck a 7,200-volt power line, electrocuting all three.

In the second case, five farm workers were moving an auger and again, it touched a 7,200-volt line. It was reported that the three workers who survived were wearing new rubber-soled shoes and the two who were killed were wearing leather shoes in poor condition.

It's a common cause of workplace deaths:

According to US Bureau of Labor records, between 1996 and 2000 about 660 workers were killed as a result of contact with power lines. That's seven percent of all work fatalities. Many of these occurred when dump trucks touched overhead lines.

Safety investigators say the first step is to identify the safety hazards and make sure workers understand the dangers. A survey should be completed that identifies all the hazard sources before any work begins.

Employers should stress safe movement of equipment, whether the worksite is a farm, a construction site or any other location where the job is complicated by overhead lines. When possible, equipment should be lowered before it is moved.

When it is necessary, the utility company should be contacted and the lines de-energized.

Victims of power line electrocutions come from just about any industry you can imagine.