Teen Worker Dies in Cotton Packing Machine

A young worker 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. The picker operator drove the fully loaded 240-horsepower picker over to the packing machine. When he arrived he noticed a tractor used to power the packing machine was not running and its lights were not illuminated. He did not see the victim.

He drove the picker along the side of the cotton packing machine and dumped the load into it. Later, co-workers searched for the young worker. They found him buried in loose cotton within the cotton stack and pulled him out. The victim had no pulse and was not conscious or breathing. He died of suffocation after being buried under the load of cotton.

Investigators recommended that workers be prohibited from entering the box of cotton packing machines and that a visual inspection of the box be conducted before dumping the cotton. Training is particularly important for harvest workers because of the size and power of the machines used, and long work shifts which frequently extend into the night.