

Safety and health alert

02/96 Farm worker loses leg

Incident

A 32 year old farm worker's left leg was amputated below the knee at a Kukerin pig farm in August 1995. The worker was digging post holes with a mechanical digger driven by tractor power takeoff. The fence wire was strung out along the ground and the worker supported the wire with his left leg. The wire was caught by the rotating post-hole digger, dragging the worker's leg onto the digger and amputating it below the knee.

Factors

1. Fence wire (including barbed wire) was strung out along the ground while the post-hole digger was operated.
2. A single worker operated the post-hole digger when other employees were in the vicinity and should have assisted him.
3. The ground was rocky and hard, and was difficult to dig post holes in.
4. The worker supported the wire with his leg while drilling.

Recommendations

1. Do not string wire out until posts are in position.
2. Employers must ensure employees can competently operate machinery and understand fence erection procedures, or provide close direct supervision.
3. Obtain the publication "Wires and Pliers" which details fence construction, repairs and costs and includes 50 farm case studies. Published by the Kondinin Group, it is available on freecall number 1 800 677 761 or from PO Box 913 Cloverdale WA 6105.

Further Information

Further information can be obtained from the WorkSafe internet site www.worksafe.wa.gov.au, or by contacting customer service on 1300 307 877 or email: safety@docep.wa.gov.au.

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