

# Safety and health alert

# 15/01 Employee falls from grape harvester

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## Incident

A 22 year old employee sustained serious spinal injuries while working as an observer on a grape harvester. The employee had positioned himself on the discharge conveyor and was clearing a cane blockage when he lost balance and fell 2.6 metres to the ground.

## Factors

- There was no safe way to access the discharge conveyor located below the leaf extraction fan area. When it became blocked with cane and leaves, the employee had to step over the platform handrails and across to the discharge conveyor in order to clear a blockage.
- The surface areas of the harvester were slippery because of light rain and grape juice.
- The possible severity of an injury resulting from a fall from the discharge conveyor had not been considered.
- There was a lack of identification, assessment and control of the fall hazard.

## Additional safety concerns:

- Ladders situated in front of the grape harvester's tyres expose the operator to the risk of injury when accessing the ladder. Existing ladders in these positions should be relocated to the rear of the machine or to the rear of the wheel.
- Taps providing water for hand washing located over or near wheels should be relocated to the rear of the grape harvester to provide safe access.
- Observers are constantly moving around checking the grape harvester. To reduce the risk of injury, emergency stop buttons need to be located on each side of the machine and on the top platform.

## Recommendations

1. Risks from falls should be controlled using the hazard identification, risk assessment and risk control measures outlined in the WorkSafe Western Australia Commission's *Code of Practice for the Prevention of Falls*.
2. Any item of plant in use at a workplace must be provided with safe means of access for the purpose of adjustment, cleaning, maintenance and repair. In this case, the access ladder should be relocated to the rear of the harvester wheels (as shown in the photograph below).
3. Appropriate platforms and guard rails should be installed to provide safe access to areas prone to blockages for cleaning, greasing and general maintenance work. In



this case, an additional platform and ladder (with safety limit switch) should be installed for access to blockages in the side discharge conveyor.

4. Any item of plant in use at a workplace should be operated and maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.
5. A safe system of work for operating items of plant, covering written safe work procedures, should be developed and operators should be provided with training to ensure that they are competent to use the plant safely.

## Further Information

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

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