

# Safety and health alert

## 19/01 Farmer receives fatal injuries from falling load

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### Incident

A contract harvesting operator drove his harvester to a remote area of a client's property at Ongerup North without advising the client of his arrival. His daughter drove the pilot vehicle (towing the header comb) to the site.

The contractor attempted to secure the comb of the header onto the feeder chute of the harvester but encountered some difficulty in aligning the main header beam onto the header lifting points.

He deployed the harvester's mechanical locking system to prevent the header and comb lowering in the event of hydraulic failure and then, equipped with several spanners, climbed (from the front) into the area under the comb.

As the contractor attempted to engage the locking latches, the comb fell from the header lifting point on the feeder chute, fatally injuring him.

The comb had a mass of 1134 kilograms and had become completely detached from the harvester. It could not be lifted, either by the operator's daughter or with a broad elevator lift.

### Factors

- No control measures, (such as the use of vehicle stands or hardwood blocks), were taken to secure the comb before attempting to align it. A general safety and health principle is never to work under an unsecured load.
- The direction of access (from the front) meant that a large portion of the contractor's body was under the comb.
- The lower support rail of the comb displayed obvious signs of distortion, and other comb components exhibited signs of collision damage and previous repairs.

### Recommendations

1. Never work under a load that can fall without guarding against unexpected movement. In this case, safer access would have been via the rear of the comb in the vicinity of the front tyres of the harvester, because no substantial part of the contractor's body would have been under the comb.
2. Never lever or otherwise apply force to an insecure load where there is an inherent risk of the load falling.
3. Efforts should be made to ensure that plant continues to meet specifications set down by the manufacturer. This should include wear limits and dimensional tolerances of components. Manufacturer's maintenance, repair and installation requirements must be followed.



## 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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