

# Hazard Alert



## Potato Harvester

### Hazard Summary

A farm worker was seriously injured while carrying out field maintenance on a potato harvester. A farmer and two workers were harvesting potatoes when the farmer noticed that the potato harvester needed to be repaired. The farmer stopped in the field to repair a bent link on the potato belt. Several other workers got off their equipment and gathered around the potato harvester to observe and assist with repairs. While the harvester was stopped, a worker climbed on the back of the potato harvester to clean the potato tops off the rollers. The farmer, unaware that the worker was cleaning the rollers, started the harvester to advance the belt. When the belt advanced, the worker's legs were pinned between the deviner chain and the rollers of the harvester. The worker suffered two broken legs.



### Contributing Factors

- Lack of communication between the farmer and the worker
- Lack of training for the cleaning and maintenance of equipment in the field
- The size of the potato harvester and the presence of several blind spots
- The farmer not accounting for all workers before starting the potato harvester
- The farmer and workers rushing to complete the repairs to the harvester
- Distraction from other workers not involved with equipment repair

#### Legislated Requirements

Section 12(1) (a) of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* states that an employer shall ensure that every reasonable precaution is taken to protect the occupational health and safety of persons at or near the workplace.

Section 12(1)(c) of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* states, that an employer shall ensure that such information, instruction, training, supervision and facilities are provided as are necessary to ensure the occupational health and safety of the workers.

## Recommendations

- Harvesters should be safely parked, turned off, and have keys removed before any cleaning or servicing takes place.
- Once the equipment has been stopped, do not move the equipment until the operator or person designated by the operator has:
  - walked around the equipment
  - is sure that everyone is accounted for
  - and is sure that no one is at risk
- Follow safety rules and procedures at all times, even during busy harvesting seasons. Rushing can increase the risk of injuries.
- Make sure workers are adequately trained on how to clean and maintain equipment safely in the field.
- Make sure young and inexperienced workers are especially well trained and supervised
- Be mindful of workers' abilities and limitations, and assign tasks accordingly.
- Make sure each piece of equipment has a designated operator responsible for the safe operation of the equipment.
- Make sure all workers are aware of all blind spots on the equipment.
- Use a pre-arranged signal of beeping the horn before starting the harvester.
- Wear high visibility vests when working around moving equipment in the field.
- Enforce a “No visitors beyond parking area” policy in the field in order to account for the safety of all workers present.
- Use extra caution at the end of a long shift to off-set the effects of fatigue.

