The Deadly Outdoors



Here are three briefs on outdoor workers who died on the job. Three different incidents (one that you may never have heard of or realized it was even a hazard) with one common thread – working outdoors.

Landscaper Dies from Asphyxia When Compressed by Palm Fronds

A landscaper died while trimming a palm tree in the back yard of a homeowner. Neither the victim nor the landscaper who hired him were certified tree trimmers. The palm tree was approximately 60 feet high. The victim was about halfway up the tree when the skirt of dead palm fronds directly above him broke loose and slid down, compressing him against the tree trunk and suffocating him. The fire department performed a technical rescue, but when they reached the victim he was in cardiac arrest.



The palm fronds that formed a skirt that engulfed the victim.



Exhibit #3. Fire department responding to this incident.
Photo courtesy Redlands Fire Department

Investigators determined that, in order to prevent future incidents, landscapers and self-employed tree trimmers who trim or remove palm trees should be performed or supervised by workers trained and certified by organizations such as the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA) or the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA). Proper work procedures and equipment are used, such as using an aerial lift and cutting fronds from above. Property owners should only hire tree trimmers who are certified by organizations such as TCIA or ISA. In addition, they should only hire companies that have a current tree trimming contractor's license (in states where this is applicable). https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/face/pdfs/16ca007.pdf

Date Palm Worker Dies After Being Stung by Bees

A date palm tree worker died after being stung by numerous bees while working in an organic date orchard. The victim and a co-worker were spraying the dates with high-pressure water when the incident occurred. The victim was reportedly allergic to bee stings and his employer was unaware of his medical condition. The victim was not carrying an epinephrine autoinjector, and the co-worker or others on the farm were not trained in emergency response for bee stings.

Investigators determined that, in order to prevent similar future incidents, agricultural employers should ensure the following. Workers who are allergic to insect stings or bites should be advised to visit a health care professional to obtain a prescription for an epinephrine auto-injector, always carry it with them, and inform their employer and co-workers of their allergy to insect stings or bites. A hazard assessment, prevention steps, and incident response plan for insect stings and bites should be incorporated into the company's Injury and Illness Prevention Program (IIPP). https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/face/pdfs/17ca003.pdf

Mower Operator Crushed and Dies After Lawn Mower Rolls Over

A 22-year-old lawn mower operator was killed when he was involved in a lawn mower rollover incident. The victim was mowing horizontally on a hill with a 30-degree slope when his mower slid down the hill and rolled onto him. Landscaper crewmembers also working in the area discovered the victim pinned beneath the mower at the bottom of the slope and immediately removed the lawn mower from on top of the victim, discovering he was deceased. The medical examiner identified the cause of death as asphyxia caused by chest compression.

Contributing factors to the incident include operating a riding mower on a slope that exceeds manufacturer's specifications; the riding mower was not equipped with a rollover protection structure; and the employee was working alone.



Area where mower overturned.

Recommendations to prevent future incidents – never operate a lawn mower on a slope that exceeds the angle limits specified by the lawn mower manufacturer; use lawn maintenance equipment designated for steep slopes. Employees should receive safety training on slope mowing with riding lawn mowers that includes slope calculation, manufacturer specifications, and terrain assessment.

To prevent rollover injuries, riding lawn mowers should be equipped with roll-over protective structures (ROPS) and seat belts. Lastly, employers should consider implementing a buddy system when working in hazardous areas such as steep slopes. https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/face/pdfs/15Ky041.pdf