

Safety Note #130

GENERAL COTTON PICKER SAFETY

Cotton pickers are powerful harvesting machines that must be operated carefully and safely to prevent injuries or fatalities. Hazards associated with cotton pickers include machine stability when turning sharply, loaded with cotton, or crossing uneven ground, large moving equipment with poor operator vision lines, rotating shafts and belts, shearing mechanical parts, hydraulic lines, blowers, noise exposure, airborne dust, and clogged spindles, chutes, grills, and vents. California Code of Regulations (CCR) Title 8, Section 3203 (7) requires employees be trained on the equipment they use in the workplace and CCR Title 8, Sections 3440 and 3441 describe regulations related to agricultural equipment.



Photographs Courtesy of West Side REC

Pre-Use Activities

- Thoroughly review and understand information provided in the cotton picker operator's manual with particular attention given to descriptions of safety procedures.
- Always perform a pre-shift cotton picker inspection, including checking fluid levels, lights, tires, and guards and shields. Inspect the cotton picker for loose hydraulic connections and worn or loose parts such as belts, gears, or lug nuts.
- If a cotton picker fails the pre-shift inspection, notify your supervisor and remove the machine from service by attaching a red tag that states "DO NOT USE." Complete red tag with appropriate information.
- Annual cotton picker training is required by CCR Title 8, Section 3664 b and should incorporate both general cotton picker training and specific training review on the cotton picker(s) that employees may use.

Operating Precautions

- Always wear appropriate personal protective equipment, including hearing protection and if conditions warrant, a dust mask.
- Before starting or beginning to drive a cotton picker, look for people or obstructions behind, along side, or ahead of the cotton picker. Maintain eye contact with others working around the cotton picker.
- When a ground harvest crew is present, the machinery operator shall adjust the mirrors to maximize visibility of the crew and establish how communication with the crew will take place.
- As the cotton picker begins to move, engage the clutch slowly and evenly – avoid jerky starts, turns, or stops.
- Never carry passengers on a cotton picker.
- Avoid operating a cotton picker within six feet of ditches, holes, depressions, and embankments.
- Always look for overhead lines before operating a cotton picker or raising the basket.
- Reduce speed when turning on roads or at row ends, crossing slopes, or driving on rough, slick, or muddy surfaces.
- Do not operate cotton pickers on slopes too steep for safe operation.
- Never turn a cotton picker with the basket raised and do not dump a basket toward a down slope.
- Never adjust or unclog machine parts until the cotton picker is shut off and the key is removed from the ignition, affected parts have stopped moving and are deenergized, and proper lockout/tagout procedures have been implemented.
- Take regular breaks when operating a cotton picker for long periods of time.
- In order, cotton picker shutdown procedures are: (1) lowering the picking unit; (2) engaging the parking brake or shifting the transmission lever to the park position; (3) and turning off the engine.

