



SPOTTERS

KEEPING PEOPLE
AND PLANT SAFE



WHY SPOTTERS MATTER

- ▶ Spotters are extra eyes and ears that prevent incidents.
- ▶ Many incidents involve blind spots, poor communication, lack of awareness of overhead hazards or dropped objects.
- ▶ Being a good spotter means staying alert, assertive, and aware.

Case Study

NP & MA COOGAN PARTNERSHIP - FARM ELECTROCUTION (FEB 2023)

On a North Island farm a seasonal worker died when an excavator boom contacted overhead power lines (~30 kV). The coroner found the employer had failed to identify the risk of the powerlines, and specifically noted “there was an absence of a safety observer or ‘spotter’ to alert the driver of the digger before its boom came within minimum approach distance from the lines.”



How a spotter could have helped:

A spotter positioned with a clear view of the boom-to-powerline clearance could have monitored safe distances and signalled the operator to stop or reposition before contact.

Key lesson

Identification of utility hazards (overhead lines) + observer oversight = critical risk control.

Case Study

TURLEY FARMS LIMITED – TRAILER UNLOADING IN SHED (MARCH 2022)

A worker acting as a “spotter” in a shed was fatally crushed when a trailer’s tailgate closed during unloading. The employer was found to have failed to implement a safe system of work (including traffic management) for unloading where a spotter was present but the system itself was deficient.



How a spotter could have helped:

If the spotter role had been supported by protocols (clear safe zone, exclusion of personnel from high-risk areas, proper communication with driver) then the risk of standing in a hazardous position might have been removed.

Key lesson:

Having a spotter alone is not enough — the spotter must be embedded in a safe system of work.

WHEN TO USE SPOTTERS



[Watch video on YouTube](#)

SPOTTERS ROLE

- ▶ Stay in a **safe, visible position**, never in the path of moving equipment.
- ▶ Use **clear, agreed hand signals or radio communication**.
- ▶ Stop work immediately if **visual contact is lost** or **unsafe conditions** occur.
- ▶ Ensure the **work area is clear** of people, vehicles, and obstacles.
- ▶ Communicate **hazards** or **changes** in the environment promptly.
- ▶ Avoid distractions, **no phones, no multitasking**.
- ▶ Confirm that **only one spotter** is guiding the operator at a time.
- ▶ Ensure **personal protective equipment (PPE)** is worn and visible (e.g., high-vis vest).



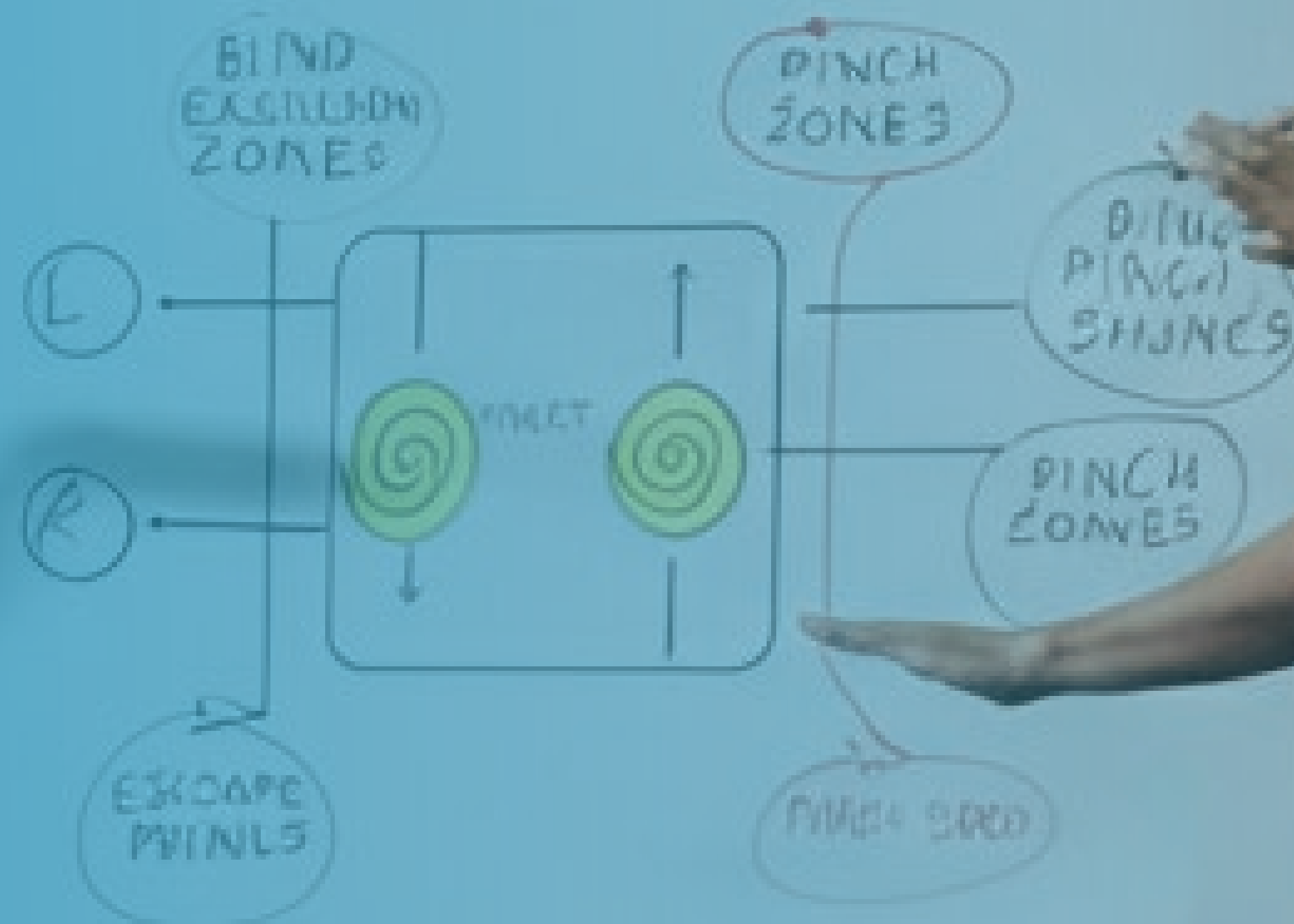
OPERATORS ROLE

- ▶ Maintain constant **visual contact** with the operator.
- ▶ Stay in a **safe, visible position**—never in the path of moving equipment.
- ▶ Use **clear, agreed hand signals or radio communication**.
- ▶ Stop work immediately if **visual contact is lost** or **unsafe conditions** occur.
- ▶ Ensure the **work area is clear** of people, vehicles, and obstacles.
- ▶ Communicate **hazards** or **changes** in the environment promptly.
- ▶ Avoid distractions—**no phones, no multitasking**.
- ▶ Confirm that **only one spotter** is guiding the operator at a time.
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SPOTTER TRAINING

To ensure spotters:

- ▶ Understand their **responsibilities** and **limits of authority**.
- ▶ Can **communicate effectively** with operators.
- ▶ Recognise and manage **hazards** around mobile equipment.
- ▶ Maintain **constant situational awareness** to prevent incidents.



AFTER TRAINING, PARTICIPANTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO:

- ✓ Explain the **role** and **importance** of a spotter.
- ✓ Demonstrate **standard hand signals** or radio communication.
- ✓ Identify **blind spots, pinch points, and exclusion zones**.
- ✓ Maintain **visual contact** and **safe positioning**.
- ✓ Stop unsafe operations immediately.

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SPOTTERS SAFETY

- ▶ Identify where spotters are needed and what hazards exist (e.g., reversing trucks, blind spots, tight areas, overhead power lines).
- ▶ **Establish exclusion zones** – Mark clear “no-go” zones around operating machinery.
- ▶ **Define safe paths and positions** – Spotter must always have a clear escape route.
- ▶ **Use only trained, competent spotters.**



BEFORE WORK STARTS

- ▶ **One spotter per operator** – to avoid confusion and mixed signals.
- ▶ **Maintain eye contact or radio contact** at all times.
- ▶ If **contact is lost, STOP immediately** – no exceptions.
- ▶ Use **two-way radios** in noisy environments or low visibility conditions.



SAFE POSITIONING

DO

- ▶ Stand **where the operator can see you clearly**.
- ▶ Stay **well clear of pinch points, swing zones, and wheels/tracks**.
- ▶ Always have a **safe retreat path**.
- ▶ Use **high ground or clear line of sight** when possible.

DON'T

- ▶ Never stand directly behind or in front of equipment.
- ▶ Don't walk backward while spotting.
- ▶ Never enter the machine's blind spot.
- ▶ Don't turn your back on moving equipment.



A close-up of a male worker wearing a yellow hard hat, safety glasses, and a high-visibility yellow jacket with reflective strips. The jacket has a patch that says "HUGH".

VISIBILITY AND HI VIZ

- ✓ **High-visibility clothing (Class 2 or 3) and hard hat with reflective strips**
- ✓ Use **bright gloves or paddles** for hand signals.
- ✓ At night or low light: **add flashing lights or LED armbands.**
- ✓ Ensure the operator's mirrors, cameras, and lights are **clean and functional.**

A close-up of a hand holding a black walkie-talkie with a long antenna. The background is a blurred green field.

OPERATOR AWARENESS

- ✓ Trust only the designated spotter.
- ✓ Operators must stop if the spotter moves out of sight or seems unsure.
- ✓ Encourage operators to communicate clearly and acknowledge signals before acting.

SPOTTER | *QUICK* REFERENCE CARD

Your Role

- ✓ Be the operator's eyes
- ✓ Prevent contact with people, plant, and power lines
- ✓ Stop the job when anything becomes unsafe

Positioning

- ✓ Stay visible to the operator at all times
- ✓ Never stand in the path of moving plant
- ✓ Keep out of crush zones and "no go" areas
- ✓ Stand where you can see what the operator cannot

During Operation

- ✓ Maintain eye or radio contact
- ✓ Watch for people entering the area
- ✓ Monitor overhead and ground hazards
- ✓ Stop work immediately if unsure or unsafe

Before Starting

- ✓ Confirm you are the only spotter
- ✓ Agree signals / radio channel
- ✓ Identify hazards: blind spots, power lines, traffic, tight spaces
- ✓ Check exclusion zones
- ✓ Wear PPE: High Vis, hard hat, boots, gloves
- ✓ Ensure you have a clear escape path

Communication

- ✓ Use clear, standard signals
- ✓ Operator must acknowledge before moving
- ✓ If visibility or communication is lost → STOP
- ✓ No phones or distractions

After the Task

- ✓ Confirm machine stopped before approaching
- ✓ Report hazards or near misses
- ✓ Give feedback to operator

