

Logging Company Owner Killed When Struck by Falling Tree

Task: Cutting timber **Occupation:** Owner **Release Date:** November 23, 2015

In December of 2014, a 56-year-old logging company owner died after he was struck in the head by a tree felled by an employee. Prior to the incident, the yarder at the cable logging site had broken down. Because of this, the owner had some of his crew performing different tasks for the day. He and a member of the crew who usually worked as the rigging slinger had been cutting and falling timber for about 5 hours. The employee had 10 years logging experience; it is unknown how much cutting experience he had. The employee was cutting a tree about 90 feet away and uphill from his employer. He cut the corner off the holding (hinge) wood on the uphill side of the approximately 100-foot tree. This caused the tree to fall sideways downhill in a direction that the employee had not intended. As the tree fell, it struck the employer in the head. The employee knew that the employer was working below him and immediately went to check on him. He found him unresponsive next to the tree he had been cutting. He told a co-worker what had happened and this co-worker called 911 to summon EMTs. The co-worker gave first aid. EMTs arrived at the scene and the employer was taken to a hospital. He remained in a coma and died the next day.



Incident scene showing the corner cut off the holding wood, which caused the tree to fall sideways.

Safety Requirements

- Work areas must be assigned so that the distance between work areas is at least two tree lengths of trees being felled. See [WAC 296-54-513\(2\)\(b\)](#); See also [WAC 296-54-539\(a\)\(b\)](#)
- The two cuts that form the undercut must not cross where they meet, except where a dutchman is required on either side of the cut. See [WAC 296-54-53910\(12\)](#)
- A backcut must leave enough hinge wood to hold the tree to the stump during most of its fall so that the hinge is able to guide the tree's fall in the intended direction. See [WAC 296-54-53910\(14\)\(b\)](#)

Recommended Safe Practices

- Place an undercut that is approximately 1/3 to 1/4 of the tree's diameter. The two cuts must meet at the apex of the angle and neither cut should bypass the other.
- The width of the hinge (holding) wood should be approximately 10% of the diameter of the tree at the stump.
- The holding (hinge) wood must never be completely cut off.

Resources

- In the Clear training packet from the Washington Logger Safety Initiative (LSI): www.lni.wa.gov/Main/LoggerSafety/Pdfs/TrainingPacketInTheClearCutting.pdf
- Free video from Labor & Industries, "Be Safe in the Woods" at: fortress.wa.gov/lni/shr/VideoDetails.aspx?VideoID=1490
- LSI Sample Accident Prevention Program for Cutting Operations: www.lni.wa.gov/Safety/TrainingPrevention/Programs/files/LSICuttingOperationsSampleAPP.doc

