

# Fatality Narrative

## Timber Faller Struck by Falling Tree\*

**Industry:** Land Clearing and Logging  
**Occupation:** Timber faller and log loader operator  
**Task:** Falling timber, land clearing  
**Type of Incident:** Struck by tree

**Release Date:** May 19, 2004  
**Case No.:** 03WA036  
**SHARP Report No.:** 71-19-2004

On July 30, 2003, a timber faller was killed when a tree that he felled struck him. The 39-year-old victim was working for an employer who was hired by a landowner to clear trees from his land. The employer, another worker, and the victim began working at the site at about 7:00 AM. At about 7:45 AM the employer found the victim lying under an alder tree. It seems that the victim had attempted to fall a tree but it had gotten hung up on another tree at about a 45-degree angle. He felled another tree so as to knock down the hung up tree, but instead the second tree slid down the hung up tree and pinned him to the ground. The backcut of the second tree was not above the facecut, as it should have been. The tree slid down the hung up tree and ended up hitting the ground about 45 degrees to the left of where the victim had intended it to fall. He had not cleared out an escape path. The victim was relatively inexperienced as a timber faller.

### Requirements/Recommendations

(! Indicates items required by law)

- ! When falling trees an employer must ensure that a competent person, an experienced cutter, supervises inexperienced workers.
- ! Employers should develop a site-specific accident prevention plan that takes into account the types of hazards that will be encountered during work.
- ! A safety meeting must be held at each new job site.
- ! Timber cutters must always plan and clear an escape path.
- ! An escape path must be used as soon as the tree or snag is committed to fall, roll, or slide.
- If a tree gets hung up while being felled, assistance from a more experience cutter should be sought.
- Timber cutters should be adequately trained in the recognition of hazards and appropriate actions to take when hazardous situations arise.

**State Wide Statistics:** This was the 38<sup>th</sup> work-related fatality in Washington State during the year 2003 and was the 2<sup>nd</sup> worker killed by a falling tree or limb, while clearing land in less than 8 months.

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*This bulletin was developed at the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries to alert employers and employees in a timely manner of a tragic loss of life of a worker in Washington State. We encourage you to consider the above information as you make safety decisions for or recommendations to your company or constituency. The information in this notice is based on preliminary data ONLY and does not represent final determinations regarding the nature of the incident or conclusions regarding the cause of the fatality.*

Developed by the Washington State Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) and Washington Industrial Safety and Health Act (WISHA) Programs at the WA State Dept. of Labor & Industries. For more information, contact the Safety and Health Assessment and Research for Prevention (SHARP) Program, 1-888-667-4277, <http://www.lni.wa.gov/safety/research/face>.