

Fatality Narrative

Excavator Operator Struck by Falling Tree Limb*

Industry: Site clearing
Occupation: Owner/operator
Task: Pushing over trees with bucket of excavator
Type of Incident: Struck by falling tree limb

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On December 11, 2002, an owner/operator was killed when a falling tree limb struck him as he was using the bucket of an excavator to push over a tree. The victim was a 61-year-old male using a rented excavator to clear his rural property to begin development of a recreational vehicle campsite. He was an experienced equipment operator who understood the hazards of logging. He had logged the site of saleable timber several years before. He was using the bucket of the excavator to push over a 105-foot maple tree that was about 18 inches in diameter at breast height. It was raining hard with winds blowing 15 to 20 miles per hour. The top of the tree leaned over the excavator's cab as the victim attempted to push the tree sideways with the left side of the excavator bucket. He opened the excavator cab door and leaned out to look up and was struck in the head by a falling dead tree limb measuring about 5 inches in diameter by 12 feet long. The limb fell from a height of about 85 feet. The victim was not wearing a hard hat.

Requirements/Recommendations

(! Indicates items required by law)

- ! When using mechanized equipment to knock down and/or remove trees, the employer and equipment operator must ensure that the equipment is suited for that use and that they follow proper logging and manufacturers recommended procedures.
- When using mechanized equipment to push over a tree, always push straight forward when possible.
- Ensure that the tree is felled in the natural direction of the lean, except if the direction of the lean creates a hazard, then appropriate safe felling methods should be used.
- ! When falling trees larger than 6 inches in diameter at breast height, follow proper logging procedures, including, tree assessment, escape path, undercut, and backcut.
- ! Rider-operated equipment used in logging and site clearing must be equipped with a falling object protective structure (FOPS).
- ! Wear a hard hat when overhead hazards are present.
- Take into account adverse weather conditions when falling trees.

State Wide Statistics: This was the 76th work-related fatality in Washington State during the year 2002 and was the 14th construction fatality of the year.

**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/sharp/face>.