

Timber Cutter Dies When Struck by Snag

Task: Falling timber

Occupation: Timber cutter

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A 28-year-old timber cutter (victim) died when he was struck by a partially cut snag that was knocked down by another tree intentionally felled to bring it down. Three experienced cutters, including the victim who was also the employer, were falling tree length timber at a job site. The victim and another cutter were working together to even up a cutting line. The cutter made an under and back cut into a snag (danger tree). The snag did not fall. The cutter spoke with the victim, who was working less than two tree lengths away falling trees, about how to bring down the snag. They decided that the victim was to stop cutting and wait while the cutter cut a tree that would then fall on the snag and push it to the ground. Going uphill from the snag, the cutter cut a tree to fall in the direction of the snag. As the tree was falling, he turned and saw that the victim was making a cut into a nearby tree. In an attempt to get the victim's attention, the cutter yelled and threw his hard hat toward him. The falling tree struck the side of the snag, causing the snag to fall 90 degrees to the right of its intended line of fall. The victim was struck by the falling snag and died at the scene.



Snag that struck and killed a timber cutter when pushed over by a felled tree.

Safety Requirements

- The employer must assign work areas so that a) trees cannot fall into an adjacent occupied work area; and b) the distance between work areas is at least two tree lengths of the trees being felled. See WAC 296-54-539(1)(a)(b).
- Cutters must be informed of the movement and location of other employees placed, passing, or approaching the vicinity of tree being felled. See WAC 296-54-53910(3).
- Cutters must give audible warning when falling trees (except when trees are less than 18 inches in diameter and cutter has unobstructed view of area and is assured no one is within the area) and a) indicate the direction of fall; b) ensure that all employees are out of the reach of the tree; and c) ensure that all employees are in clear of logs, fallen trees, snags, or other tree that may be struck by the falling tree. See WAC 296-54-53910(4)(a,b,c).
- If a cutter has determined a tree cannot be safely felled, the work must stop until the cutter has conferred with a supervisor or an experienced cutter and determined the safest possible work method or procedure. See WAC 296-54-539(7).
- A cutter must not fall a tree or danger tree alone when at least two cutters are necessary to minimize hazards. See WAC 296-54-539(11).

Recommended Safe Practices

- Cutters must work as a team to ensure the safety of all workers in the work area.
- Avoid "pushing" a danger tree, other than to overcome a falling difficulty.

Resources*

- Free workplace safety and health consultations are available from L&I at: www.SafetyConsult.Lni.wa.gov
- Free video from Labor and Industries, "Be Safe in the Woods" at: www.LNI.BeSafeintheWoods
- Accident Prevention Program for Cutting Operations. Washington State Logger Safety Initiative at: www.lni.wa.gov/Safety/Basics/Programs/Accident/Samples/LSICuttingOperationsSampleAPP.doc

*These internet links have been shortened for publication and will not operate in your web browser as written. To access these resources, please go to the SHARP publications page at www.lni.wa.gov/Safety/Research/Pubs/, click on *Logging*, open this document and follow the links from there. Prepared by Randy Clark, WA State Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) Program and the Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH), WA State Dept. of Labor & Industries. The FACE Program is supported in part by a grant from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH grant# 5 U60 OH008487-09).

