

Tree Trimmer Falls 25 Feet from Bucket

INCIDENT FACTS

REPORT #: 71-257-2024s

REPORT DATE: August 19, 2024

INCIDENT DATE: January 6, 2023

VICTIMS: 59 years old

INDUSTRY: Landscaping services

OCCUPATION: Tree trimmer

SCENE: Private residence

EVENT TYPE: Fall from elevation



A 59-year-old experienced tree trimmer died after falling from an aerial bucket that got caught on a branch. He worked for his employer, a tree care service company, for 24 years as a trimmer and bucket operator.

He was on a three-member crew pruning birch trees at a private home. They were using a bucket truck to remove damaged branches. He went up in the bucket alone while his co-workers worked on the ground. He was wearing all required personal protective equipment (PPE), including a fall arrest harness. After cutting a few branches, he had to move the truck to change the bucket angle near the tree. He lowered the bucket and unclipped his harness to get out. A co-worker helped him move the truck and set the outriggers. No one saw him re-enter the bucket before he went up again.

As the bucket went up, the ground crew saw the truck tilting toward the passenger side with its wheels off the ground. The bucket appeared to be caught and pressing on a branch with enough force to tilt the truck. When the bucket broke free of the branch, the truck's wheels slammed down and shook the bucket so violently it ejected the trimmer 25 feet to the ground. The ground crew ran to him, called 911, and began CPR as directed by emergency dispatchers. First responders soon arrived but pronounced him dead at the scene from severe fall injuries.

Following the incident, investigators found:

- The worker's fall arrest harness lanyard was not tied-off in the bucket.
- The crew had a safety briefing at the jobsite before starting work.
- The bucket truck manufacturer inspected and found the vehicle to be in safe operating order.



Photos 1 and 2. Left photo shows boom extended from bucket truck. Right photo shows bucket in branches.

FATALITY NARRATIVE



Photo 3. Unsecured snap hook on trimmer's fall arrest harness lanyard.



Photos 4 and 5. Left photo shows bucket truck with boom extended. Right photo shows truck's boom lift platform with extended outriggers and rear wheels chocked.



Photos 6 and 7. Left photo shows fall hazard warning label on base of boom lift. Right photo shows other warning and danger labels on base of boom lift. Arrow shows emergency stop switch.

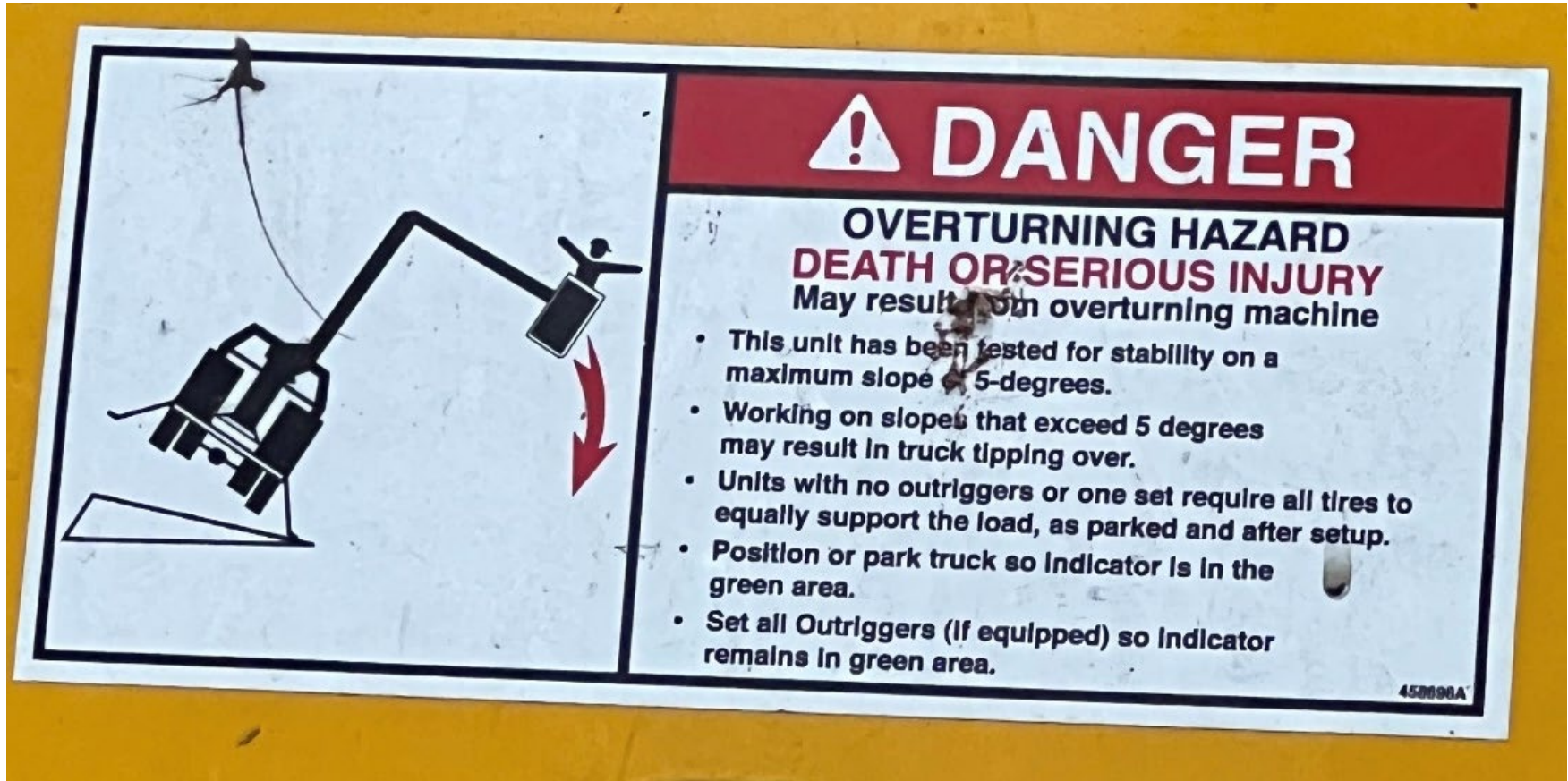


Photo 8. Overturning hazard danger label on base of boom lift.

Requirements

- Before elevating the platform (aerial bucket), ensure all persons on the platform wear a full body harness with a lanyard attached to either: (a) The manufacturer's recommended attachment point; or (b) The boom or platform if the manufacturer does not specify an attachment point. The employee must never attach a lanyard to an adjacent pole, structure, or equipment. See [WAC 296-880-30015\(2\)](#)

Recommendations

FACE investigators concluded that, to help prevent similar incidents, employers should:

- Develop and enforce policies and standard operating procedures (SOP) in their accident prevention program (APP) requiring:
 - o A co-worker be present to observe when the bucket operator enters the bucket.
 - o The bucket operator to give the co-worker visual confirmation they are wearing a personal fall arrest harness with the lanyard tied-off in the bucket before going up.
 - o The co-worker to yell “all stop” or use a small air horn and press the boom’s emergency stop switch when an unexpected hazardous situation needs to end quickly to prevent injury.

Recommendations

- Update policies to reflect changes in site conditions and fall protection equipment. Review policies with workers at crew meetings, monthly safety meetings, and annual fall prevention stand-downs.
- Provide recurring hands-on fall protection training and ensure workers maintain proficiency.

Resources

[5-Minute Safety Talk: Bucket Truck Safety](#)

National Safety Council

This narrative was developed to alert employers and workers of a tragic incident in Washington State and 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.

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