

Preventing Tree Trimmer Deaths

Across the nation, 228 workers died in the landscaping services industry in 2023. In Washington State, eleven landscaping services workers died from 2020 through 2024. Most were tree trimmers who died in falls. Tree trimmers face many severe hazards and are commonly killed or injured in falls and when struck by objects. Proper policies, training, and equipment can prevent these fatalities and injuries.

TREE TRIMMER FELL AFTER CUTTING LIFELINE

A 36-year-old experienced tree trimmer was the climber on a five-member crew removing a 120-foot fir tree. As he climbed up the tree, he cut branches along the way. Suddenly, he screamed and fell backwards to the pavement. He had cut his flip line with his chainsaw.

What led to this incident?

- He had a lifeline but did not tie it off as required by [ANSI Z133-2017-6.3](#).
- The employer allowed him to use his own lighter, soft-fiber rope as a flip line instead of requiring him to use the heavier, cut-resistant steel-core line that they provided.



Severed flip line.

TREE TRIMMER STRUCK BY STORM DAMAGED LIMB

A 51-year-old tree trimmer was with a three-person crew falling a storm-damaged maple tree that was supporting two uprooted firs. First, he cut a few branches from the top of the maple. Next, he performed the face cut at the base. As he did, a 14-foot fir limb broke off and got hung up in the canopy. While doing the back cut, the broken limb dislodged. It fell straight down, striking him in the forehead.

What led to this incident?

- The trimmer was not protected from being struck by loose or broken limbs.
- The crew did not use a spotter and pause to check for hanging limbs before continuing.



Fir limb that hung up and fell.

TREE TRIMMER FELL AND STRUCK WHEN RIGGING FAILED

A 28-year-old tree trimmer was part of a four-person crew removing a 127-foot fir. They planned to use a [lowering device](#) (port-a-wrap) to lower sections. However, they did not have the proper equipment. Instead, they wrapped the rope twice around the tree for friction. The climber cut off a 330-pound section. It fell about a foot before the rope tightened. The weight of the section shock loaded the rope, which lifted the tree trimmer off the ground. He lost his grip on the rope, stumbled, and fell backwards down the embankment, hitting his head on a rock.

What led to this incident?

- The trimmer was unable to control the section due to its weight and the rigging design.
- There was no qualified person on-site to supervise.



Section at bottom of embankment.

TIPS TO LIVE BY

- Develop and enforce policies in your [Accident Prevention Program](#) (APP) that require tree trimmers to:
 - Do a site-specific [job hazard assessment](#) (JHA). Make a safety plan before any tree trimming or removal begins.
 - Always use top quality, reputable, and arborist-certified equipment and techniques, especially for lifelines and rigging.
- Have a qualified arborist or [Certified Tree Care Safety Professional](#) (CTSP):
 - Make decisions about safe and controlled tree trimming and removal practices.
 - Directly supervise workers involved in tree work.
 - Provide initial and recurring training. Train in hazard identification, fall protection, safe use of equipment, and in [ANSI Z133-2017, Section C. Manual Tree Felling Procedure](#).

RESOURCES

[Tree Trimming Safety Fact Sheet](#) and [Solutions for Tree Care Hazards](#) – OSHA

SHARP Publication No. 47-35-2025