

Hooktender Suffers Internal Injuries and a Broken Arm after Choker Breaks

Task: Yarding Felled Trees

Occupation: Hooktender

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A 43-year-old hooktender suffered a fractured arm and internal injuries after being struck by flying debris or the skyline when the choker broke. The hooktender was working as part of a three-man rigging crew. The rigging crew was trying to pull some logs located above a riparian management zone (RMZ) in the next road line. The hooktender believed that the next road would not have enough lift to clear a rock wall in front of the trees.

The crew decided to try tagging out from the current road line. They used a Chinese tag consisting of three chokers to reach some of the logs. One choker was set at the tops of three felled trees having a cumulative weight greater than 11,000 pounds. A second choker was set at the middle of four trees, with a cumulative weight greater than 13,000 pounds. These two chokers were connected to the carriage through the bell of the third ¾ inch choker.



Photo of the broken choker

The intention was to move the trees closer to the existing road line so the chokers could be shortened. The crew set the turn and then cleared out to what appeared to be a safe zone. The hooktender walked away from the turn following the contour of the ground, stopping 205 feet from the turn and 114 feet from the skyline. The other two members of the rigging crew went straight uphill and slightly behind the turn, stopping 201 feet from the turn.

When the yarder pulled the logs, the choker line from the carriage where the other two lines were plugged into broke. The skyline flew sideways towards the crew creating a slingshot effect. The skyline picked up debris and threw it sideways in the direction of the hooktender. It is uncertain if the hooktender was struck by flying debris or by the skyline, but it is assumed that he was struck by flying debris.

Safety Requirements

- Chokers must be placed near the end of the log/tree whenever possible. See WAC 296-54-577(3).
- Chokers must be at least one size smaller than the mainline. If a dropline is used, it must have a breaking strength equal to a line one size smaller than the mainline. See WAC 296-54-54770(2).
- Employees must move away from the turn so as to be above or behind the turn and in the clear. See WAC 296-54-577(5).

Recommended Safe Practices

- Ensure that logs set in chokers do not exceed the manufacturer's weight capacity.
- Ensure that chokers are set near the ends of logs closest to the yarder to make it less likely for the log to upend or swing.
- Whenever possible, ensure the area where the crew is standing is free from any log movement or potential for debris to enter.

Resources*

- Free workplace safety and health consultations are available from L&I at: www.SafetyConsult.Lni.wa.gov
- Free Video from WorkSafe BC: Finding a safe position: Cable yarding in forestry at: <http://WorkSafeBC.YardingSafePosition>
- Free Video from Labor and Industries: Be safe in the woods at: <http://LNI.BeSafeintheWoods>

Need more information?

Please contact Eric Jalonen, Research Investigator at 360-902-6751 or email Eric.Jalonen@Lni.wa.gov

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