

## Timber Cutter Killed after Walking Under a Standing Cut Up Tree

**Task:** Felling Trees

**Occupation:** Timber Cutter

**Release Date:** April 26, 2013

In October 2010, a 55-year-old timber cutter with more than 30 years of experience was killed when a 10-inch hemlock tree fell on him. The victim and another cutter were hired to fell second growth timber. On the day of the incident, the victim and the other cutter got onsite before daylight and walked to their strips. Both cutters were properly equipped and wearing the necessary PPE. The weather was clear with a slight breeze.

The victim was felling a stand of trees on slightly sloped ground. The stand was to be yarded through a patch of timber that needed to be left for wildlife. This means that the victim had to buck some of the trees to ensure they could be yarded. The victim had felled three trees successfully in this stand and started to work on a fourth, a 10-inch hemlock. After he made the face and back cuts the wind blew and the tree set back. The victim did not set wedges while making the backcut.

The victim decided to leave the tree standing, and start bucking the felled trees. The victim walked in front of the cut and standing tree, when the wind died, and the tree fell towards the victim. The tree struck the victim on the right side of his head and shoulder, crushing his head against a previously felled tree. The other cutter, who was working approximately 400 feet away, didn't see any trees falling on the victim's strip and turned off his saw to listen. The other cutter only heard the victim's saw idling and decided to check on the victim.

The cutter found the victim pinned between two logs with the 10-inch hemlock on top of him. He assessed the situation, and went to the landing to let the shovel operator know that the victim was hurt and needed emergency medical personnel. The victim was pronounced dead at the scene.



The stump left after cutting the hemlock tree that struck and crushed the victim.

### Safety Requirements

- Trees with facecuts and/or backcuts must not be left standing unless all the following conditions are met: See WAC 296-54-53910(16)
  - The cutter clearly marks the trees;
  - Discontinues work in the hazardous area;
  - Notifies all workers who might be endangered; and
  - Takes appropriate measures to ensure that the tree is safely felled before other work is undertaken in the hazardous area.

### Recommended Safe Practices

- Never work or walk under a cut-up tree that is still standing.
- Use a wedge to assist in ensuring trees fall in intended direction.
- Finish falling any tree that has a cut in it before moving to the next activity.
- As a last resort, drive a single tree into the set-back tree to push it to the ground.

### Resources\*

- Free workplace safety and health consultations are available from L&I at: [www.SafetyConsult.Lni.wa.gov](http://www.SafetyConsult.Lni.wa.gov)
- Free video series on safe work procedures for fellers from WorkSafe BC at: [http://WorkSafeBC\\_FallerTraining](http://WorkSafeBC_FallerTraining)
- 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](mailto:Eric.Jalonen@Lni.wa.gov)

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