

Timber Cutter Injured When Struck by a Hung-up Tree

Task: Cutting a tree

Occupation: Cutter

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A 31-year-old timber cutter was hospitalized after being struck by a hung-up tree he had previously cut. He had 2 years of cutting experience, but this was his first thinning job. It was his second day on the strip. First, he felled a 13 inch diameter 99 foot tall hemlock, which hung-up in another standing tree 37 feet away. Next, the cutter felled a tree next to the tree supporting the hung-up tree. Then as he was making an undercut in the tree in which the hemlock had become lodged, the hung-up hemlock fell on him. The tree struck him on his arms. If the tree had fallen a few inches further uphill, it would have struck his head.



The cutter was struck by a falling hung-up tree he had previously cut. As he was making an undercut in the tree supporting the hung-up tree, the hung-up tree fell on him.

Safety Requirements

- Trees with face cuts and/or back cuts must not be left standing unless all the following conditions are met: a) The cutter clearly marks the tree; b) Discontinues work in the area; c) Notifies all workers in the hazardous area; and d) Takes appropriate measures to ensure that the tree is safely fell before other work is undertaken in the hazardous area. See WAC 296-54-53910(16).
- If a cutter has determined a tree cannot be safely fell, 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).

Recommended Safe Practices

- Train cutters: a) in the hazards and safe work procedures of cutting operations that they are not familiar with; b) how to safely fall hung-up trees; c) to never work in front of a cut-up tree.
- Go over hazards of a falling operation in the pre-job safety meeting.
- If a tree becomes hung-up in another tree, special care must be taken when falling the tree supporting the hung-up tree: 1) Assess the situation carefully; 2) If possible, keep the trunk of the supporting tree between you and the hang-up. For example, if the hang-up is held by limbs on one side of the supporting tree, fall the supporting tree from the opposite side; 3) If you are on steep ground and the hang-up is on the uphill side of the supporting tree, fall the tree by blasting or another safe alternative.

Resources*

- Free workplace safety and health consultations are available from L&I at: www.SafetyConsultants.Lni.wa.gov
- Free video from Labor & Industries, "Be Safe in the Woods" at: <https://fortress.wa.gov/lni/shrl/VideoDetails.aspx?VideoID=1490>
- Accident Prevention Program for Cutting Operations. Washington State Logger Safety Initiative at: www.lni.wa.gov/Safety/TrainingPrevention/Programs/files/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).

