

Timber Cutter Suffers Broken Leg When Struck by Cut Tree Sliding Downhill

Task: Falling Timber

Occupation: Hand Cutter

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In January 2012, a 28-year-old timber cutter with two years of cutting experience suffered a broken leg when he was struck by a felled tree. The injury occurred when the tree slid downhill before he was in the clear. On the day of the incident, the victim and another cutter worked separately for about four hours, then paired up to fall the remaining few trees on a slope when they were no longer able to keep a two tree-length separation.

With three trees left to fall, the victim moved down the hill to fell the tree closest to the bottom of the draw. He planned to walk on a previously felled tree to the bottom of the slope and then go up the other side of the draw. While the victim was still crossing to the other side of the draw, the other cutter, who had 15 years of experience logging, felled one of the remaining trees.

The tree fell in the intended direction when cut, but hit the end of a bucked log which was raised six feet above the ground. The falling tree landed on the elevated end of the log, pivoted, and slid downhill toward the victim. The victim was only 30 feet away and did not have time to escape. The sliding tree hit him in the leg, breaking the bone in his thigh. The other cutter extracted the injured victim with the help of a friend.



Raised end of bucked log.

Safety Requirements

- Employee work areas must be spaced and employee duties organized so the actions of one employee do not create a hazard for any other employee. See WAC 296-54-513(1).
- A distance of more than two tree lengths is maintained between work areas on any slope where rolling or sliding of trees or logs is reasonably foreseeable. See WAC 296-54-539(1)(d).
- The employer's accident prevention program must cover how and when to report injuries. See WAC 296-54-515(3)(b).

Recommended Safe Practices

- Never assume. Always verify that co-workers are in the clear before cutting.
- Workers need to maintain safe distances from each other. Follow the two tree-length rule.
- Employers need to be sure all employees know and understand the emergency procedures for getting help to an injured worker. It could save a life.

Resources*

- For more logging safety resources, see the WA L&I Safety Topic page and go to logging:
LNI.wa.gov/Safety/Topics/AtoZ/
- Fallers Logging Safety Manual for new fallers from Oregon FACE:
FallersLoggingSafetyManual.OHSU
- Free Video from Labor and Industries: Be safe in the woods at:
LNI.BeSafeInTheWoods

Need more information?

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