

Timber Cutter Struck by Small Hemlock

Task: Cutting timber **Occupation:** Timber cutter **Release Date:** 2018

In June 2018, a 44-year-old timber cutter with 12 years of experience was seriously injured when he was struck by a falling small hemlock. His employer was subcontracted to do hand falling of timber. On the day of the incident, he and two other cutters were working at the site. They were being paid by the hour because the job was considered to be extremely dangerous and needed to be done without rushing. The site had standing trees of various sizes, including many that were densely packed with small stems. There were a lot of “jackpots”—trees leaning into other trees with bound up tops. The cutter made partial cuts in two trees and was going to push them down with another tree. He noticed that there was a small leaning hemlock 39 feet away on the slope above him. It did not appear to be touching the tree he was cutting, so he did not think that there was a danger of it coming down. He felled the tree and started along his escape path. As he was doing this, he slipped and fell. While he was lying on his back on the ground, the 6-inch diameter hemlock fell and struck him in his midsection and legs. His spine was severed, resulting in paralysis of his legs and lower body.



Photo 1



Photo 2



06/06/2018
Photo 3

Photo 1. The tree that broke off and the direction of its fall.

Photo 2. The tree and the location of the cutter when it struck him. The tree was bucked after it fell.

Photo 3. Trees leaning into each other in the area near where the cutter was falling timber.

Safety Requirements

- One worker must not fall a tree or danger tree when the assistance of another worker is necessary to minimize the risk of injury caused by overhead hazards, loose bark, or interlocked limbs, conditions of the tree or cutting conditions. See [WAC 296-54-539\(11\)](#).
- Domino falling of trees, including danger trees, is prohibited. Domino falling does not include the falling of a single danger tree by falling another tree into it. See [WAC 296-54-53910\(9\)](#)

Recommended Safe Practices

- Always make a thorough risk assessment of hazards in your work area. When conditions are especially dangerous slow down and look for hazards, such as leaners and trees that are bound up with each other's tops. Perform assessments more frequently as you work.
- When planning operations at a site, consider hazards when deciding whether to use hand fallers or mechanized equipment.

