

Operator Falls from Boom Lift while Tree Trimming

SUMMARY

On April 2, 2020, a 55-year-old operator working as part of a crew trimming trees died after he fell from the basket of a boom lift while trying to pull cut tree branches into the basket.

On the day of the incident, the operator was working as part of a three-person crew to remove trees at a residence. The crew arrived at the site at approximately 8:30 a.m. It was their first day on the site. The weather was sunny and clear. Their plan was for the operator and a coworker to work in the elevated boom lift to limb trees with chainsaws while the employer worked on the ground and chipped the limbs.

They first positioned the boom lift near the garage of the residence in order to limb the trees above it. The two workers then entered the basket and elevated it so that they were able to start cutting the lower branches of the tree. The boom lift platform was approximately twelve feet above the roof of a shed owned by the next-door neighbor.

They decided to bring the cut branches into the basket instead of letting them fall onto and damage the garage and shed. They had been working for about an hour. To get the branches into the basket, the operator opened the side access gate of the basket and was attempting to pull them in after the other worker cut them. As the operator was pulling branches into the basket, he leaned forward through the gate and fell from the basket to the surface of the shed roof. Both workers in the boom lift had personal fall protection harnesses in the basket but were not wearing them.

They called 911 and attempted to administer CPR to the operator. He was airlifted to a hospital where he died two days later.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Washington State Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation investigators concluded that to protect employees from similar hazards employers should:

- Train workers on how to safely operate and work in boom lifts.
- Ensure that workers always wear personal fall protection when they are exposed to fall hazards while working in boom lifts.
- Develop an accident prevention program (APP) that describes the hazards associated with tree trimming and tree removal and how to control them.
- Conduct a job hazard analysis (JHA) before starting a new job to identify the hazards associated with each step and how they will control them.

SHARP Publication # 52-48-2021_summary. The full version of this investigation report, along with the detailed recommendations and discussions section, can be found at: www.lni.wa.gov/safety-health/safety-research/files/2021/52_48_2021_TreeTrimmerFallFromBoomlift.pdf

The Washington State Fatality Assessment and Control (WA FACE) program is one of many workplace health and safety programs administered by the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries' Safety & Health & Research for Prevention (SHARP) program. It is a research program designed to identify and study fatal occupational injuries. Under a cooperative agreement with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH grant# 2U60OH008487), WA FACE collects information on occupational fatalities in WA State and targets specific types of fatalities for evaluation.

More about WA FACE can be found at: www.lni.wa.gov/safety-health/safety-research/ongoing-projects/work-related-fatalities-face



Incident scene driveway of residence with boom lift that workers were using to limb trees.