

DIS/DL&I
FACE-90-05
DATE: NOVEMBER 13, 1990

TO: Division of Safety Research
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

FROM: Division of Industrial Safety, Massachusetts Department
of Labor and Industries

SUBJECT: A Tree Worker Dies After Falling From A Tree

SUMMARY

A 43 year old male worker fell to his death while cutting branches from a tree with a chain saw. Although the victim was using a safety belt and lanyard, he accidentally cut through the lanyard and fell approximately 50 feet to the ground. The property owner was present but some distance away when the victim yelled out and fell. The Department of Labor and Industries investigator concluded that in order to prevent future similar occurrences, employers should:

- conduct job-site evaluations to identify potential hazards and implement appropriate control measures
- develop and implement safe work procedures for workers who are exposed to fall hazards

INTRODUCTION

On July 31, 1990, a 43 year old male tree worker died after falling approximately 50 feet to the ground. On August 1, 1990, the town's Chief of Police notified the Massachusetts Department of Labor and Industries via the FACE Hotline of the death. On August 3, 1990, a Division of Industrial Safety inspector visited the site and began an investigation of the incident. Emergency Medical Services and Police reports and photographs were obtained.

The victim was a self-employed tree worker who had been in the business for approximately 10 years. The victim was working alone but sometimes worked with his brother as a partner. The homeowner was the only witness. There was no evidence of a safety program or safety policy established by the worker.

INVESTIGATION

The victim was working alone with the homeowner to cut down two pine trees. The trees were approximately 75 feet tall. The victim was cutting branches with a chain saw up at the 50 feet height. He was going to cut off the top of the tree by cutting a notch on one side and then cutting through to the notch from the other side. He had a rope tied to the top of the tree and it was being pulled by the homeowner about 70 feet from the base of the trunk,. The victim had a safety belt on an a lanyard circling the tree. It appears that he was cutting away some branches in order to make the final cut to top off the tree when he accidentally cut through the lanyard. Upon realizing what he had done he yelled out and then fell backwards to the ground. The homeowner rushed to his side, checked his pulse and affirmed that he was conscious. He then quickly summoned Police and Emergency Medical Services. They responded in three minutes. The victim was transported to the hospital and died on and a half hours later.

CAUSE OF DEATH

The medical examiner listed cause of death as multiple blunt trauma.

RECOMMENDATION/DISCUSSION

Recommendation #1: Employers should conduct job-site evaluations to identify all potential hazards and implement appropriate control measures.

Discussion: The employer should have established an evaluation procedure to determine how to cut down trees with the least hazardous exposure to employees. The employer should have required that all trees be cut at the trunk when the falling tree presents no danger to people or property.

Recommendation #2: Employers should develop and implement safe work procedure for workers who are exposed to fall hazards.

Discussion: Massachusetts safety regulation (454 CMR 10.25.7) require the use of fall protection equipment when employees are exposed to the hazards of falling more than twenty-five feet above land. In this case, the victim was using a lanyard. However, the lanyard was exposed to accidental cutting by the branches or topping off trees position the lanyard beyond the cutting area or secure the lanyard to a safety line tied to the forest industry. Use of these lanyards should be extended to the landscaping industry.

REFERENCES

1. Massachusetts Department of Labor and Industries, Division of Industrial Safety, 454 CMR 10.00, Rules and Regulations for the Prevention of Accidents in Construction Operations, state House Bookstore, 1988.

NAMES:

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