



The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)

Promoting productive workplaces  
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# Fatal Incident Summary Report: Falling Tree Limb Strikes Logger

FACE 8305

## INTRODUCTION

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), Division of Safety Research (DSR), is currently conducting the Fatal Accident Circumstances and Epidemiology (FACE) Study. By scientifically collecting data from a sample of similar fatal accidents, this study will identify and rank factors which increase the risk of fatal injury for selected employees.

On May 6, 1983, four loggers were select-cutting mature timber. One logger suffered fatal head injuries when a limb fell striking him on the head. The emergency medical service was summoned, but the worker was pronounced dead at the scene.

## CONTACTS/ACTIVITIES

After receiving notification of the accident from the State Deputy Chief Medical Examiner, a research team, consisting of an epidemiologist and a safety specialist, were dispatched to conduct discussions with the company, examine the site, interview witnesses, and obtain comparison data from suitable comparison co-workers.

A debriefing session was held at the site with the owner and 3 other crew members. During this meeting, information was obtained on general work practices as well as work activity shortly before, during, and after the incident. A brief tour of the work site and the incident site was provided. Video and 35mm pictures were taken at the site proved helpful in analyzing the accident. The parents of the victim were also interviewed.

## SYNOPSIS OF EVENTS

The company employs between three (3) to eight (8) loggers depending on the time of year and work backlog. On the day of the incident there were four (4) workers – owner/supervisor, heavy equipment operator, trimmer, and a general laborer. The general laborer experienced the fatal injuries. At noon, the supervisory cutter, with 22 years experience, completed the face and back cuts of a 30" diameter tree. As the tree fell, the cutter and his three assistants stood approximately 25 feet at a 60 degree angle to the side of the tree. As the tree fell, the upper limbs brushed against a neighboring tree causing a dried limb to recoil. In the process of recoiling, the dried limb, 5" by 18', 150 lb. dried limb, snapped and fell vertically. The limb struck the worker in the left temple killing him. Witnesses reported the victim was not looking up at the time.

## GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The four person crew of loggers depended upon the support of each other to accomplish the daily work activity. There are several conclusions to be drawn from this incident. First, the worker was an inexperienced general laborer. The least experienced worker was subjected to a greater variety of risks. Second, the worker, either knowingly or unknowingly, placed himself in the danger zone of the falling tree. Fallers are also reminded to station themselves at a 45 degree angle to the rear of a falling tree.

Fatal occupational injuries of this kind to loggers are not uncommon. Roughly one-fourth of all accidental deaths among loggers were caused by blows from falling objects. NIOSH has summarized these and other statistics on job injuries to loggers in a Surveillance Report, Job Injuries Among Loggers (DHHS-NIOSH Publication No. 83-104). Recommendations for similar situations can be made based on commonly accepted work procedures.

## REFERENCES

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3. Frazier, T. M. and Coleman, P.J. "Job Injuries Among Loggers. NIOSH Surveillance Report." DHHS (NICSH) Publication No. 83-104.
4. What the Occupational Safety and Health Law Means to Loggers. August 1971. American Pulpwood Associations, Washington, D.C.

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