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Richard W. Braddee BA & John R. Myers MSF

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Logging-Type Fatalities in the U.S. Production Agriculture Industry, 1980-1992

Richard W. Braddee, BA
John R. Myers, MSF

SUMMARY. Logging activities such as felling trees for firewood and clearing farm land of trees, are conducted by many farmers throughout the country. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), National Traumatic Occupational Fatalities (NTOF) surveillance system, these logging-type practices resulted in 173 work-related “struck by falling object” deaths to farmers during the years 1980 through 1992, which represent 46% of all struck-by-falling-object deaths in the agricultural production industry during this 13-year time period. The majority of these deaths occurred in the midwestern (41%) and southern (46%) regions of the United States. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678. E-mail address: getinfo@haworth.com]

KEYWORDS. Fatalities, agriculture industry, logging activities, surveillance

Richard W. Braddee is Safety and Occupational Health Specialist and John R. Myers is Mathematical Statistician, Division of Safety Research, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Morgantown, WV 26505.

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Logging is one of the most hazardous industries in the United States.^{1,2} Logging activities such as felling trees for firewood and clearing farm land of trees, are conducted by many farmers throughout the country. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), National Traumatic Occupational Fatalities (NTOF) surveillance system, these logging-type practices resulted in 173 work-related "struck by falling object" deaths to farmers during the years 1980 through 1992, which represent 46% of all such deaths in the agricultural production industry during this 13-year time period. Previous research on deaths in the logging industry showed that being struck by falling objects was the most common cause of death for loggers (48% of all logging deaths), and being struck by a felled tree was the most common event (68% of all falling object deaths).³ Similarly, 132 (76%) of such deaths in the agricultural production industry were due to being struck by felled trees. An additional 23 (13%) farm worker deaths were caused by being struck by falling limbs or snags. The majority of these deaths occurred in the midwestern (41%) and southern (46%) regions of the United States.

In an industry as inherently hazardous as logging, the training of workers is vital. Similarly, the recognition and abatement of hazards associated with cutting trees by farmers is paramount. Farmers should be aware of these hazards and the appropriate measures needed to reduce them. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration⁴ has implemented a regulation (29 CFR 1910.266) for the logging industry which addresses many of the hazards of logging and recommends prevention through proper training, hazard recognition, and personal protective equipment. These regulations, although not enforceable in farm-related work, provide useful information for the prevention of fatal and non-fatal incidents involving farmers.

NIOSH conducts investigations of fatal occupational injuries through the Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) project. Between October, 1991 and March, 1995, the FACE program investigated 16 fatal incidents that involved workers in the logging industry. Although no logging-type deaths have been investigated in the agricultural production industry, many of the same hazards exist for farmers as for loggers. Thus, the results and recommendations of the logging-related FACE investigations should also have application to logging-type activities conducted in the agricultural setting.

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