

INDUSTRY ALERT

INJURY

Spring pole strikes chainsaw, cutter suffers neck & jaw lacerations

(Source: Forest Resources Association Inc.)

What happened?

In an incident outside Ontario, a logger with four years' experience was felling trees as part of a two-man cut-and-skid team. The cutter was considered fully trained, he was wearing all the appropriate personal protective equipment and the chain brake on his saw was in good working order. He was limbing a recently-felled tree that had flattened a two-inch (four-centimetre) diameter hemlock tree when it fell. The hemlock did not appear to be under any tension. When the cutter began to saw the hemlock about 18 inches (45 centimetres) above ground level, the hemlock snapped and struck the chainsaw, propelling it back toward him. The chain brake stopped the circulation of the chain but the impact of the saw bar and chain damaged the cutter's hardhat, face shield and ear muff, and lacerated his lower neck and jaw.

The cutter was flown to hospital, where he underwent surgery for two and half hours to repair neck tissue. He was off work for about two months and required physiotherapy as part of his recovery.

Why did it happen?

Although the bent-over hemlock tree did not look as though it was under tension the way a classic spring pole does with its arched trunk, the hemlock had not snapped when it was pinned by the felled tree and therefore was capable of suddenly releasing a high amount of energy. Sawing the hemlock from the outside of the curve of the trunk caused it to spring suddenly upward toward the cutter.

How can it be prevented?

A spring pole is created when a fallen tree pins a smaller tree or branch. Not all spring poles are large and immediately obvious. Like any other felling hazard, a spring pole must be dealt with immediately before any other work can proceed. As a general rule, all bent-over trees or pinned trees should be treated as potential spring poles.

If the arch of the spring pole is large enough, the safe way to release it is to stand inside the arch and saw outwards at the top of the curve. If the arch of the spring pole is quite small, as in this incident, the cutter should carefully shave the underside of the bent tree in order to allow the wood fibre at the top side to release slowly.

If a cutter is in doubt about how to safely release a spring pole, a prudent alternative is to use the skidder to winch or push the log or tree in order to release the spring pole.

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