

INDUSTRY ALERT

FATALITY

Worker returning from lunch struck by cut tree left standing

What happened?

A worker involved in a logging operation was returning from lunch to the cutting site when he was struck in the neck and back by a tree that had been cut that morning but had not fallen. The worker was pronounced dead at the scene.

Why did it happen?

Three main factors contributed to the death of this worker:

- Another worker had cut the tree through its base in the morning but the tree had not fallen. The worker left the tree standing and did not warn his co-worker about it.
- After lunch, the worker who had left the tree standing returned with a machine to knock the tree down, but the worker did not ensure that his co-worker was cleared from the danger zone before starting the work.
- The two workers, who had completed their cutter training four days previously, were working without supervision.

How can it be prevented?

Sometimes a tree that has been notched and backcut will not fall. This is one of the most dangerous hazards in conventional logging. Because a cut tree left standing can fall unexpectedly at any time, it must be dealt with immediately. In this case, the cutter left the tree standing until after lunch, and he neglected to warn his co-worker about the hazard. Both of these actions contravened the Regulations for Industrial Establishments:

- Section 109(a)(i): A tree shall be felled only after all workers other than the logger felling the tree are cleared from the danger area.
- Section 110(b)(i): When a hang-up occurs, the hang-up shall be felled immediately.

A supervisor—had one been on-site—could have instructed the inexperienced cutter to deal immediately with the cut tree left standing rather than after the lunch break, and the supervisor could have warned any other workers in the vicinity about the hazard. Section 25(2)(a) of the Occupational Health and Safety Act requires the employer to “provide information, instruction and supervision to a worker to protect the health or safety of the worker”. Since both workers had completed their cutter training only four days previously, they would have benefited greatly from close supervision.

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