

FATAL ALERT

July 26, 2005

A small landscaping company was contracted to assist with an Aspen tree regeneration program by cutting down Lodge Pole Pine and Limber Pine Trees. The contract called for cutting down all trees that were not Aspen trees in a given area and leaving them to be burned later. The tree growths in the area ranged from a sparse number of trees growing to an overcrowded tree growth. The terrain characteristics in the area consisted of typical Wyoming mountain range watershed.

The crew felling trees consisted of 4 individuals: the company owner, the company manager, and two laborers. Both the owner and the manager had worked in the landscape and tree care business for about 7 years. Management was knowledgeable of OSHA rules and industries' standards. The two laborers had limited to uncertain tree felling experience. All crewmembers were equipped with the proper personal protective equipment, and considered themselves safety conscious.

The crew was well into finishing their fourth day on the project when the accident occurred. The crew was not following prescribed cutting rules while felling the trees. The crewmembers were using a cut they described as a swing cut. They were not notching the front of the trees or establishing a one-inch hinge to help control the trees as they were falling. The weather at the time of the accident was mild with winds averaging 8 miles per hour and temperatures were in the mid 60's. Severe weather had passed through the area the night before with heavy rains reported.

Some time prior to the accident the manager had cut a large Limber Pine tree, making a single cut through the tree from back to front, at a slight downward angle, leaving a small partial hinge near the front of the tree. The tree did not fall as planned and the manager did not seek assistance with the danger tree. The manager moved away from the tree and ended up positioning himself where he was in the path of the danger tree when it started to fall. He was struck and fatally injured by the tree as it fell. Evidence suggests his saw may have been out of gas and he was walking towards a gas storage location when the tree struck him.

Significant Factors:

- The employer was not enforcing OSHA rules relating to cutting methods.
- The employer felt that the deceased employee was the last employee he needed to worry about.
- Employees were felling trees towards trees still needing to be cut.
- The employee created a danger tree using inappropriate cutting methods.
- The employee did not seek assistance with or mark the area of the danger tree.
- The employee was walking or working in the fall path of the danger tree.
- There was no one on site with current first aid training.

Recommendations:

- Brief all employees on the facts and circumstances of this fatal mishap.
- Ensure all employees understand and follow the OSHA rules and the ANSI Standards.
- Document all training accomplished.
- Ensure employees do not leave a danger tree unmarked.
- Ensure employees always seek assistance when dealing with danger trees.
- Ensure all employees fell trees in the opposite direction they are traveling in.
- Ensure that there is always a current first aid trained worker on remote sites.
- Ensure that there are always adequate first aid treatment materials available on site.