

April 2018

Forestry death

This bulletin provides information about a recent forestry death. Learning from accidents can help prevent future fatalities. WorkSafe thanks the family of the forestry worker for their support with sharing these details.

Date and time of event

12 April 2017 at approximately 1.40 pm.

Victim

The faller was 42 years old. He was part of a crew of 10 workers.

Description of area

The topography of the area is classed as 'very easy to rolling'. There is some mature undergrowth with a few dead spars and the odd dead tree in the general area.

Figure 1 (below) shows the scene of the accident. The old poplar spar has caused the drive tree to 'Gimbal' (Seesaw) and kick backwards striking the victim.



FIGURE 1: Accident scene showing escape route blocked by a tree felled prior to falling the drive tree

Relationships

The land in the East Coast Gisborne area was owned by the Crown. A large company owned the trees and contracted the employer of the victim to harvest them.

Description of the event

Felling was occurring in an area that had been opened up the previous day. The felling was part of a planned work system.

The faller drove a tree to clear a hung up tree and in the process the driving tree has hit an old poplar stump/spar and this has caused the tree to rebound back and strike the victim.

Circumstances of the accident

There were no witnesses.

Evidence from the scene would indicate that it was most likely that:

- the drive tree has hit the hung up tree without taking it to the ground
- the drive tree has slid down the right hand side and then struck a 2 m poplar spar (or stump) that was in direct line between the driving tree and hung up tree
- as the driving tree hit the spar it has caused the tree to pivot lifting the butt in the air
- forces from the tree hitting the hung up tree and the poplar stump have caused the butt of the tree to move backwards, approximately 1.8 m behind the stump of the driving tree and hit the victim
- the victim managed to radio for help.

The escape route was blocked by a previously felled tree.

The immediate area of incident showed poor felling techniques for four trees including short and small scarfs, thick hinge material left in place and minimal to no back cut. However, the wider area of his felling did not show such poor technique and the drive tree was felled with correct technique. The victim's tool belt was found 26 m away from the accident site.

Safety systems that were applied to reduce the risks

- Faller was experienced and fully qualified. He was fit. There was no evidence of impairment by drugs, alcohol or fatigue.
- Hazards and risks were documented in the compartment description issued by the tree owner.
- The victim's employer audited the work practices of the victim on 25 March 2017.
- The tree owner conducted monthly felling audits of workers most recently on 5 March 2017.
- An independent audit is done annually. The latest audit was 18 October 2016.
- All audits showed no areas of concern of the felling techniques by the victim.
- A tailgate meeting held the morning of the accident covered the work plan for the day and discussion of the relevant hazards and risks. These included the identified risk of 'Felling-Spars, rotten and dead trees'. The meeting was documented.
- The faller called in to notify he was going to perform a tree drive. The call was recorded by the hauler operator.
- The drive tree was felled with good technique
- The faller had been nominated for an industry award prior to the accident for his safety work ethics and overall dedication to the industry.

Lessons from the accident

Dead spars need to be removed before the faller begins work in the area.

Establishing escape routes are a critical part of felling technique.

A more comfortable method (such as shoulder harnesses) could be used for fallers to wear their gear to reduce the tendency for fallers to remove their waist belt.