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Abstract of a Mishap

Mishap Type: Struck by flying object (tree branch)
Injury: Fatality
Type of Work: Logging – Timber Sales Contract
Equipment: Chain saw



DESCRIPTION OF THE MISHAP:

While attempting to manually fell using a chain saw an approximately 110 foot, seventy five year old red oak tree, a logging employee was struck on the head by an approximately 4.5 foot long 4.5 inch diameter limb propelled from an adjacent tree when the red oak tree being manually felled came in contact with as it was falling. The adjacent tree whipped (“reflexed”) rapidly backwards as the red oak contacted and passed by. The whipping action caused the limb from the smaller tree to break away rapidly becoming a reverse flying debris projectile striking the employee as he retreated from the falling tree area. OSHA and the forestry industry refer to this as throw back or “widow maker”.

DIRECT CAUSE:

- ◆ Failure to plan, evaluate hazards, implement controls, and utilize safe procedures associated with felling a tree using a chain saw. As one tree fell through or came in contact with an adjacent tree during felling, a branch was thrown back toward the logger.

INDIRECT CAUSE:

- ◆ Supervision – The lack of employee operations being supervised. The supervisor was not on site.
- ◆ PPE: No hard hats used - The contractor did not assure communication to employees the requirement to wear hard hats at all times.
- ◆ Clear work area - Failure to establish procedures to reduce manual felling area congestion. Prior to felling, the chain-saw operator did not clear away brush or other potential obstacles which might interfere with cutting the tree or using the retreat path.
- ◆ Retreat path: Contractor did not assure a clear path or retreat required for manual tree felling operations.
- ◆ Method of operations - Though the majority of the harvesting was accomplished utilizing a mechanized cutter (large loader type tractor with cutting blade attachment), on the day of the fatal mishap the employee elected to manually fell four trees using a chain saw. Chain saws on site were normally used to cut branches (“top” fallen trees) from already fallen timber as their primary function.
- ◆ Adjacent trees - Conditions, such as the location of other trees, were not evaluated and precautions taken before felling the tree.
- ◆ Hinge wood: The tree cutting did not leave sufficient hinge wood with the back cut to hold the tree to the stump and wedges were not used.
- ◆ Training - Failure to implement adequate employee safety training specific to logging operations. Contractor did not provide or validate that all employees on the site had training records.

ROOT CAUSE:

- ◆ Lack of contractor supervisory oversight for safe procedures of employees on the worksite.
- ◆ No written company safety program or policies.

LESSONS LEARNED:

- ◆ Constantly supervised safe work practices must be utilized at all times when working around logging operations. Adherence to established OSHA rules must be maintained.
- ◆ Safety performance by workers is a direct result of on site leadership and management. Effective safety enforcement systems implemented by managers and supervisors can ensure proper safety practices are followed.
- ◆ Contractors should provide sufficient evidence of an effective written safety program before work begins.

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