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SAFETY ALERT

15-S-13

TIMBER CRUISER FALLS OFF ELEVATED, DOWNED TREE

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BACKGROUND: On a clear summer morning in the South, a timber cruiser was attempting to cross a drainage ditch. The ditch was located in a fairly level hardwood bottom with a sparse understory.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS: The self-employed timber cruiser had over 35 years of forestry experience. He was a relatively large and moderately heavy-set, well-built individual. While cruising timber, he approached a deep, wide, mostly dry drainage ditch and began to identify a path to cross the ditch.

UNSAFE ACTS AND CONDITIONS: The ditch was 6 to 8 feet deep and nearly 16 feet wide from bank to bank. The large, spreading top of a sawtimber-sized American Beech tree had fallen across the span of the ditch. The timber cruiser contemplated the options of walking the log or climbing down into the ditch and back up the other bank. He concluded that it would take great effort to climb down and out of the bank. So he decided to walk across the tree top.



ACCIDENT: While walking across the log, his left foot was on the main portion of the top and his right foot was on a branch which forked to his right side. He lost his footing and fell approximately 6 feet downward and landed on his right shoulder and right side, forcefully striking a 6-inch diameter branch lying in the bottom of the ditch.

INJURY: The timber cruiser realized that he was injured but wasn't sure of the extent of his injuries. He was able to pull himself out of the ditch and walk back to his truck. He then drove himself to the hospital nearly 30 miles away. The hospital staff assessed his condition and made the decision to fly the contractor to a facility with better capabilities to attend to his injuries. The final diagnosis was 10 broken ribs, a broken right clavicle, broken right scapula, and a punctured right lung.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CORRECTION:

- Take time to fully assess the consequences when evaluating how to handle a hazardous situation. Avoid walking and climbing over hazards where there is a risk of losing one's balance.
- Many logging and woods worker injuries are due to slips, trips, and falls, and they are much more likely to occur when the individual is in a hurry.
- Proper footwear (slip-resistant soles) can help prevent slipping.
- Notify at least one other individual of your daily location/plans when working alone in the woods.

Reviewed by:
Southwide Safety Committee;
Rick Meyer
Appalachian/Southwide Region Manager

Please follow equipment manufacturers' recommendations for safe operation and maintenance procedures.