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SAFETY ALERT

16-S-2

FALLING LIMB KILLS FELLER

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BACKGROUND: On a summer morning in the Appalachians, a timber cutter was manually felling timber in a partial harvest of a mature hardwood stand. The terrain was fairly level, and logging conditions were good.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS: The twenty-year-old timber cutter was the son of the logging business owner. Although he and all the personnel associated with this logging business were considered operationally experienced, his level of formal safety training was unknown. He was not wearing a hard hat or other personal protective equipment.

UNSAFE ACTS AND CONDITIONS: The timber cutter was felling a birch tree with a top that was entangled in another nearby tree. This nearby tree contained a large, dead limb in its top that was either weakly attached or broken and suspended overhead. As the birch tree fell, the timber cutter stepped back only a few steps from the stump.

ACCIDENT: The birch tree landed safely, but it dislodged the dead limb from the neighboring tree. This 12-foot-long limb came down and hit the timber cutter in the head and back.



INJURY: The timber cutter was killed nearly instantly from the impact.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CORRECTION:

- Continually train timber cutters to evaluate trees in the immediate area properly *prior to* felling, so that potential hazards, such as dead limbs, lodged trees, etc., can be identified and appropriate control measures implemented. Danger trees should be removed by mechanical means, or the area should be bypassed.
- Employers should ensure that tree fellers prepare an escape path and move diagonally in a safe direction away from the base of the tree as it is falling, and not remain near the stump. (Most logging fatalities occur within 8 feet of the stump. The 2014 National Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries reported that about 84% of the forestry-related fatalities were timber “fallers” by occupation, and three-fourths of *all* the 2014 forestry and logging fatalities were attributed to the victim being “struck by object or equipment.”)
- Wear all required personal protective equipment, including hard hats.

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

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