

Rapid Lesson Sharing

Event Type: Felling Injury

Date: Aug. 18, 2016

Location: Soberanes Fire, Los Padres
National Forest; California

“When asked if we would have done anything different—Yeah, run faster!”

Spotter

NARRATIVE

A “Falling Set,” actually two Sawyers—one to cut and the other to be a Spotter—were assigned to clear hazardous snags near the control line on Division ZZ. The snags were identified as a hazard to resources holding and patrolling the fire line. An Engine Crew was assigned to assist the Sawyers by clearing the brush away from the base of the snags and cutting escape routes away from the base of each snag. (The Sawyer who was felling the snag when this incident occurred said that dozers could not reach the snags to push them down.)

The snag that they were cutting had a 5 feet+ diameter, was double trunked, and was estimated to be 80 feet tall. The Sawyers surveyed the tree from all sides, looked at the lean, and decided to take the right trunk. The object was to cut the tree so it would fall away from the other trunk, angling downhill away from the fire line. Therefore, the Sawyer was to take one side of the tree first. After felling that side, he would cut the other trunk down.

The Spotter was located on the uphill side, next to an adjacent snag, watching the Sawyer.

The Sawyer did the face cut, then bored into the tree to do the back cut. Once into the tree, black sawdust started coming out—indicating that where the two tree trunks joined to the base, the tree was unsound. When the Sawyer made the back cut (boring in), the tree shuddered. A six-foot long branch/limb broke off and started falling to the ground.

Branch/Limb Hits Sawyer

The Spotter hollered “*Look Out!*” But, because the saw was still running, the Sawyer couldn’t hear him. The Spotter starting running to the Sawyer, tripped, and fell down. When the Spotter looked up, the tree fell—angling away from the Sawyer.



Snags to be felled.



The tree being sized-up for felling.



PHOTO ON LEFT – The branch that struck the Sawyer is circled.
PHOTO ABOVE – After the Sawyer was injured during felling operations, this half of the tree was left standing. Two days later, it was felled.

***“When I got to him and lifted him up,
there was blood everywhere. I was scared.”***

Spotter

Even so, the Spotter could see the Sawyer lying on the ground. The branch/limb had hit the Sawyer in the hardhat and right shoulder. The force drove his hardhat down onto his safety goggles, broke his nose, and threw him to the ground. His head hit a stump and debris, causing lacerations to his head. He was unconscious for approximately one-half minute.

Personnel watching and videoing the falling operation ran to help. [To see this video, that captures this incident and these personnel responding, click on this link: <https://youtu.be/rfBdVjGmzyE>. When they saw the great amount of blood on the Sawyer’s head and face, they called for medical assistance. Personnel onsite stabilized the Sawyer (stopped his bleeding) and requested an extraction by helicopter.

Medical personnel on the helicopter did an assessment and they flew the Sawyer to a hospital.

The Sawyer was diagnosed with a deep bruise on his right shoulder, scratches on his face, a broken nose, two black eyes, and lacerations to his head that required stitches. He was released from the hospital and went home to recover from his injuries. He is expected to return to work in a week or so.



FAR LEFT – The injured Sawyer’s hardhat suspension. No damage.

NEAR LEFT – There were no scuff marks or damage to the injured Sawyer’s hardhat.

“In my 46 years of felling, I have turned down only 3 to 4 trees.”

Injured Sawyer

SUCCESSSES

- ✓ The personnel on scene acting quickly, activating the medical and Incident Within an Incident (IWI) plans.
- ✓ The medical protocol set for the incident was followed and went well.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- ✓ The Sawyer was experienced. He and the Spotter evaluated the tree, assessed the lean, checked adjacent snags, inspected the base of the tree, and determined a cutting plan.
 - ❖ **What went wrong?**
 - ❖ **Did the tree need to come down?**
- ✓ Is the use of a Spotter effective during felling operations?
 - ❖ **Was the Spotter too close? Could he have been hit?**
 - ❖ **Should the Faller have been looking up?**
- ✓ What makes a tree a “hazard”?
 - ❖ **Is every dead tree a hazard?**
 - ❖ **Who makes the determination that a tree should be felled?**
 - ❖ **When is felling a tree a bigger hazard than avoiding it?**
- ✓ Does your Crew/Module/Unit have an Incident Within an Incident (IWI) plan in place?
 - ❖ **Have you practiced it?**

This RLS was submitted by:

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