

Safety and health alert

01/97 Worker falls from street tree

Incident

An employee of a tree service company with over twelve months experience working in Rockingham during December 1996 suffered a broken wrist, elbow and pelvis when he fell from the weeping peppermint street tree he was trimming.

The worker was attached to what appeared to be a substantial limb by a climbing rope and seat harness. The limb however was rotten and gave way under the worker's weight. He fell approximately 4 metres, landing on the verge and roadway. His head narrowly missed the concrete kerbing.

An employee in the next tree who had a senior first aid certificate immediately went to the aid of the injured worker and ensured the consequences of the injuries were minimised.

Factors

This worker was trained and was working with the principal of the firm. Factors that contributed to this accident included:-

- the non-use of a supporting structure for the worker independent of the tree, for example an elevating work platform;
- a lack of an adequate assessment of the limb to support the worker;
- the total reliance on the limb to support the worker; and
- working at a substantial height - four metres.

Recommendations

1. Where practicable, elevating work platforms must be used in all situations in preference to fall arrest equipment.
2. Where factors such as site access make the use of elevating work platforms not practicable, workers should not rely on support from a tree for their safety without careful consideration of the tree's integrity.
3. Contract principals should ensure when accepting tenders that contractors will comply with regulation 3.49 and 3.50 of the Occupational Safety and Health Regulations 1996.
4. Any tree pruning near power lines requires particular care. A Code of Practice for Personnel Electrical Safety for Vegetation Control Work Near Live Powerlines was released in August 1996 by the Office of Energy and must be complied with. For more information, telephone the Office of Energy on 422 5200, WorkSafe Western Australia on 327 8727 or Western Power on 411 7867.

Further Information

Further information can be obtained from the WorkSafe internet site www.worksafe.wa.gov.au, or by contacting customer service on 1300 307 877 or email: safety@docep.wa.gov.au.

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