



Tree lopper leg amputation

The purpose of this Safety Alert is to highlight the circumstances which led to a worker's leg being amputated and suggest possible control measures to assist industry to manage the risk.

Background

A worker employed by a tree lopping company had his left leg amputated, while assisting with the lowering of branches using a rope system.

The rope in use was green, approximately 30 metres long and tied around the base of the tree twice. Approximately 10 metres of the rope was being used to lower branches and the remaining 20 metres of the rope was on the ground next to the worker, who was standing beside a truck mounted elevating work platform. The worker had untied the rope from a branch that he had just lowered and was sending it back up the tree. Another person then dragged that branch away to feed it into the wood chipper. The spare rope length beside the worker became snagged in the branch as it was dragged towards the chipper.

When the branch was fed into the wood chipper, the rope was also drawn into the moving parts of the machine. It appears that the rope was either pulled taut between the tree and the wood chipper, hitting the worker, or, as the rope travelled towards the chipper at speed the whipping affect caught the workers leg. The worker was thrown against one of the outriggers on the elevating work platform by the rope, cutting off his leg.

The site supervisor, who was overseeing the operation, immediately shut down the wood chipper and commenced first aid.

Contributing factors

- The colour of the rope was green making it difficult to see.
- Excess rope was on the ground in an area where it could become tangled in branches being dragged away.
- No one noticed that the excess rope had become snagged on the branch.

Action required

- Keep any rope not in use away from the work area, especially where branches are being dragged into the wood chipper.
- Ensure that excess rope is secured. For example, use a rope bag or a retractable system.
- Use a suitable length of rope; limit the amount of excess rope.
- Use rope that is a contrasting colour to the vegetation, or clearly marked with contrasting colour, making it easier to see.
- Check that nothing is entangled in material for chipping before it is fed into the chipper.

Further information

- Checklist for tree surgeons and gardening services including safe work with EWP's www.worksafe.wa.gov.au
- Working safely with trees www.worksafe.vic.gov.au
- Contact: WorkSafe customer service 1300 307 877 or Email: safety@commerce.wa.gov.au

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