

Safety and health alert

12/98 Tree felling

Incident

A 25-metre dead jarrah tree fell on a self-employed firewood cutter near Boddington in August 1998. The firewood cutter made a small scarf cut to the south side of the tree, which had a 900 mm butt diameter, and then made a back cut or felling cut that removed nearly all holding wood.

The firewood cutter walked directly towards his vehicle from the rear of the tree. His back was to the tree when it started to fall 45 degrees from its expected direction. A branch struck the firewood cutter, who sustained fatal head injuries.

Factors

1. The scarf cut was not deep enough. The recommended depth of scarf cut for hardwood trees with a butt diameter in excess of 400 mm is between one third and one half the diameter of the tree.
2. An adequate amount of holding or hinge wood to control the direction of fall was not left after the back cut. The combination of inadequate scarf depth and lack of holding or hinge wood permitted the tree to fall in an unplanned direction.
3. The feller took a direct route to his vehicle, into a hazardous area adjacent to the tree's expected line of fall, after completing the scarf cut and felling cut.

Recommendations

1. Guidelines for safe chainsaw use can be found in Australian Standard 2727-1984. Special consideration should be given to felling dead trees, because they may be more difficult to fell in the desired direction.
2. Workers carrying out tree felling must be trained and qualified, or under the supervision of a qualified person. The West Australian forest industry has a system of qualifications for tree fellers and chain saw users.
3. Tree fellers should stand clear of a falling tree, using escape routes prepared before felling. The preferred escape is 45 degrees on either side of a line drawn opposite the intended direction of fall.

Further Information

December 1998

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.

Date:

A413426



Department of Consumer
and Employment Protection
Government of Western Australia

