

Case 485. A 36-year-old landscape laborer died when a 20-inch diameter and approximately 20-foot long willow tree branch snapped off the trunk and fell to the ground, pinning the decedent against the controls of a machine he was operating

A 36-year-old male landscape laborer died when a 20-inch diameter and approximately 20-foot long willow tree branch snapped off the trunk and fell to the ground, pinning the decedent against the controls of a machine he was operating. The decedent and a coworker were working in a yard, moving piles of leaves/mulch to the east side of the property. On the day of the incident, the wind was gusting up to approximately 50 mph. His coworker had left the area to move a truck trailer and heard the tree crackle. When he returned to the area, he walked toward the back of the property and saw the branch laying on top of the decedent, who was still on the machine. The coworker called for emergency response. He was declared dead at the scene. The county's Department of Public Works lifted the tree branch from the decedent.

MIOSHA General Industry Safety and Health Division did not issue a citation to the employer at the conclusion of the investigation.

The MIOSHA General Industry Safety and Health Division issued the following Health and Safety Recommendation:

Consider developing, implementing, and maintaining a high wind/inclement weather emergency action plan for employees that work in areas where they would be exposed to hazardous situations. Employees perform landscaping operations in areas where trees could be a factor in hazardous weather and windy conditions. These conditions have the potential to create a scenario that could result in an injury for the workers involved. Having the policy/plan in place could create a baseline to determine when hazardous situations could arise from inclement weather and how to quickly determine if work should stop and shelter be taken.