

Case 500. 62-year-old owner of a tree trimming/removal service died when he was thrown from the bucket of a bucket truck when the 12-inch diameter cottonwood tree branch he was cutting struck the bucket.

A 62-year-old male owner of a tree trimming/removal service died when he was thrown from the bucket of a bucket truck when the 12-inch diameter cottonwood tree branch he was cutting struck the bucket. The decedent was elevated approximately 30 feet. He was not wearing fall protection. A line had been attached to the branch the decedent was cutting and a small tractor operated by a coworker (Coworker 1). The decedent instructed Coworker 1 to back slowly away as he cut the branch so that when the branch was cut through it would not strike a nearby building. As the decedent made the cut on the branch, the tension was suddenly released, and the branch snapped back and struck the bucket. The decedent was propelled out of the bucket. He fell 30 feet and struck an air conditioner. He landed between another air conditioner and a retaining wall. Coworker 2 witnessed the incident and ran over to the decedent who spoke a few words. The building owner called EMS. Coworker 2 began rescue breathing; Coworker 2 could not perform CPR due to the position of the decedent. EMS arrived and attempted CPR. He was transported to the hospital where he was pronounced deceased.

MIOSHA General Industry Safety and Health Division did not issue a citation at the conclusion of its investigation. The Division issued a Notice of Potential Hazard to the employer at the conclusion of its investigation.

Notice of Potential Hazard

The following information is provided to the employer to correct an identified hazard. A MIOSHA rule violation exists, but employee exposure has not been determined or evidence is not sufficient to document a violation at this time.

GI Part 53. Tree Trimming

Rule 408.5313(3) A safety belt, safety strap, tree trimming saddle belt or rope saddle shall be provided to and used by an employee when working aloft in a tree, as prescribed in general industry safety standard, Part 33. Personal Protective Equipment, being R 408.13301 et seq. of the Michigan Administrative Code. A safety strap shall be worn and attached when aloft in the bucket of an aerial device. A saddle or safety belt made unsafe by damage, defect, or alteration shall not be used.

If the tree trimming business is re-established, ensure that proper fall protection training is provided. Also ensure that a safety harness and lanyard is provided and used by employees aloft in a tree or the bucket of an aerial device or truck.