

INCIDENT FACTS

REPORT #:
22MI067

REPORT DATE:
May 20, 2024

INCIDENT DATE:
July 20, 2022

WORKER:
57-year-old

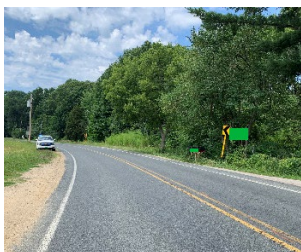
INDUSTRY:
Local Government

OCCUPATION:
Lead Worker

EVENT TYPE:
Struck By



The site where the branch was connected.



Northbound roadway view - north side of downed tree.

Worker Struck by Vehicle While Clearing Fallen Tree from Road

SUMMARY

A 57-year-old employee was fatally struck by a motor vehicle while attempting to remove a downed tree that was blocking a public roadway. He worked for his employer, a county road department, for 24 years. On the day of the incident, a resident from the neighborhood reported to local authorities that a fallen tree was blocking the road. In the call, the resident mentioned that people were driving around the tree and onto the grass alongside the road. The victim was then dispatched by the department to assess the situation as he was the most senior employee on site.

Upon reaching the reported location, the employee observed a substantial oak tree branch obstructing the road. This branch, with a diameter of 24 inches, remained connected to the main tree at a point approximately 15 feet above the ground. The speed limit on the curve south of the branch was 50 MPH. After assessing the scene, the employee felt it was urgent to get the branch removed so he parked his F-250 work truck with the flashers on in the northbound lane to block traffic and positioned cones on the south side of the tree. Recognizing that the tree removal required more than the STIHL Chainsaw he had, the employee called for a dump truck and a Gradall excavator, both operated by individuals trained in handling medium-sized equipment.

While the employee worked on clearing smaller branches as he awaited the arrival of the medium equipment operators, a former employee of the road commission garage arrived on scene by chance and volunteered to help. A driver that was passing by then drove through the green reflective traffic cone on the north side of the tree, collided with the tree branch, and struck the victim. He was pronounced deceased at the scene by EMS. The former employee who had stepped away to get gloves from his car witnessed the incident.

The victim wore personal protective equipment (PPE) comprising a yellow shirt adorned with reflective strips, steel-toed boots, gloves, and safety glasses. Furthermore, he had completed work zone safety training.



Arrangement of truck and tree branch blocking the road on the north side of the downed tree.



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A satellite view of the area where this incident took place. A yellow arrow points to the tree from which the branch fell. The shaded yellow area shows the approximate area of the road blocked by the branch. A red arrow shows the direction in which the vehicle involved in this incident was traveling. A red X represents the approximate location of the driver's car after the incident. A blue rectangle shows the approximate location of the decedent's work truck. A blue X shows the decedent's location following the collision. The triangles show where the green and orange traffic cones were placed by the decedent.

[MIFACE](#) (Michigan Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation), Michigan State University (MSU) Occupational & Environmental Medicine, 909 Fee Road, 117 West Fee Hall, East Lansing, Michigan 48824-1315.

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REQUIREMENTS

Employers must:

- Provide employees with employment and a place of employment that is free from recognized hazards that are causing, or are likely to cause, death or serious physical harm. See [408.1011](#).

RECOMMENDATIONS

MIFACE investigators concluded that, to help prevent similar occurrences, employers should use the following:

- Enhanced Traffic Control Measures
 - Employers should ensure that during roadway incidents involving fallen trees or other hazards, a minimum of two vehicles are deployed to provide a barrier for both directions of traffic. This measure is crucial for the safety of workers from errant vehicles approaching from either direction.
- Promotion of Visibility
 - Employers should prioritize visibility for workers at all times. This involves providing high-visibility clothing that meets ANSI/ISEA 107—2020 standards, ensuring workers avoid emerging from between vehicles or obstructions, and employing effective warning signals. Visibility is key to ensuring that workers are easily identifiable and safe in their work environments, especially in hazardous conditions like active roadways.
- Adoption of Michigan MUTCD Guidelines
 - Employers should review and adopt the Michigan Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) guidelines. These guidelines outline protective measures for traffic incidents of short to intermediate duration, including the use of large imposing vehicles or law enforcement with high-intensity flashing lights or strobes. By following MUTCD guidelines, employers can ensure standardized and effective traffic control measures are implemented during roadway incidents.
- Training and Retraining
 - Employers should prioritize initial and periodic retraining on incident worker safety, including barricading and warning signals. Training should cover proper traffic control procedures, the use of safety equipment, and hazard recognition to empower workers with the knowledge and skills necessary to ensure their safety in roadway work zones.
- Utilization of Law Enforcement
 - During highly vulnerable work situations, such as roadway incidents of short duration, employers should consider the use of law enforcement units to enhance traffic awareness and safety in the work zone. Law enforcement presence can help mitigate risks posed by errant vehicles and improve overall safety for workers.
- Installation of High-Intensity Warning Lights
 - Employers should consider installing high-intensity warning lights equivalent in visibility to those used by emergency services. These lights can significantly enhance visibility and serve as effective warning signals for approaching vehicles, reducing the risk of accidents and fatalities in roadway work zones.

CITATIONS

No citations were issued by the MIOSHA General Industry Safety and Health Division. MIOSHA issued a safety recommendation advising that when responding to incidents involving fallen branches or trees obstructing roadways, to dispatch two employees and to evaluate whether the clearance operation can be completed within 20 minutes. If the operation is estimated to take 20 minutes or less, vehicle(s) with strobe lights should be used to block the lane(s) of traffic while the branches or tree are cleared to open a lane for traffic. If the operation is estimated to take more than 20 minutes, the lane(s) of traffic should still be blocked using a vehicle with strobe lights, and the workers should remain in the vehicles until additional crew members arrive.

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