

Case 23. 45-year-old male tree trimming crewmember was killed when struck on head by falling tree.

A 44-year-old male was a member of a 4-person crew hired by a homeowner to remove a tree as well as limb adjacent trees from their backyard. A briefing was conducted that morning going over the work to be accomplished and work assignments. Coworkers observed the victim to be distracted that morning. The victim was assigned to operate the woodchipper at the front of the residence. He had worked at the company for approximately four months. The company owner (feller) and a coworker were felling the tree and another coworker was limbing an adjacent tree. The victim was assigned clean up duties, taking limbs and other debris to the woodchipper in the front yard. The victim had activated the emergency stop bar on the chipper with a limb partially fed into it. It is unknown why the victim activated the emergency stop. The chipper was not jammed and the victim had limbs and other debris near the chipper. The victim had been instructed that he was not to enter the backyard if the chainsaw was operating. For unknown reasons, the victim entered the backyard through an entrance gate. Shrubs blocked the view of the backyard entrance gate and the feller could not see the victim entering the backyard. The victim entered the backyard just as the feller had finished his backcut. The coworker who was pushing the tree to control the direction of its fall saw the victim and yelled his name. The victim could not get out of the way of the 33-foot falling tree and was struck on the head. CPR was initiated by coworkers and continued by emergency responders. The victim was declared dead at the scene. The victim was not wearing a hard hat.

MIOSHA issued the following Serious citation to the employer:

1. The employer did not enforce the use of head protection when employees are required to be present in areas where a hazard exists from falling or flying objects or from other harmful contacts or exposures. (Personal Protective Equipment, Part 33, Rule 3370(1))