

Case 187. 47-year-old tree trimmer/arborist was killed when he fell approximately 60 feet while topping a 90-foot tall, two-foot diameter white pine.

A 47-year-old male tree trimmer/arborist was killed when he fell approximately 60 feet while topping a 90-foot tall, two-foot diameter white pine. The decedent was a member of a three-person crew contracted by a homeowner to remove the tree following damage it sustained by a lightning strike three days prior to the incident. The company owner, the decedent, and another coworker arrived at the site with a boom truck to remove the tree. The owner and the decedent began removing the branches. The boom truck had a maximum height of 63 feet to gain elevation while cutting and roping branches to be lowered to the ground. After working several hours, they reached the limit of the boom. The owner and decedent, who had owned his own tree trimming company for over 15 years, assessed the tree and determined that the tree could withstand the strain of topping it. The decedent was wearing a safety harness when he roped off to the tree and climbed out of the boom to begin preparing to top the tree. At this point, the company owner lowered the boom back into the cradle of the truck and then moved to a position approximately 20 feet in front of the truck. The company owner watched the decedent top the tree. As the company owner turned away, he heard a loud crack and looked up to see approximately 30 feet of the tree trunk, the decedent, and the top part of the tree falling towards him. The owner called out to the other coworker who was approximately 15 feet away to run. The tree trunk had broken off approximately 30 feet above the ground. The falling tree parts struck the hinged part of the boom at the front of the truck and then bounced off the hood to the ground. The decedent landed face down with part of the tree on top of him. The crew immediately called 911 for help. A neighbor who was a nurse had just arrived at her home was alerted to the emergency. She came to the incident scene and asked the workers to cut away the tree on top of the decedent. She began CPR. Emergency response arrived and the decedent was taken to a local hospital where he was declared dead.

MIOSHA General Industry Safety and Health Division issued the following alleged Serious citation and Other-than-Serious citation at the conclusion of its investigation.

SERIOUS:

TREE TRIMMING AND REMOVAL, PARTA 53, RULE 4081.5334(1).

Ensure that when topping, equipment such as a crane, shall be used to lower branches and limbs if the tree cannot stand the strain.

OTHER-THAN-SERIOUS:

RECORDING AND REPORTING OF OCCUPATIONAL INJURIES AND ILLNESSES, PART OSH 11, RULE 1139(1).

An oral report of a work-related incident resulting in a fatality or the impatient hospitalization of three or more employees was not made within eight hours after the occurrence to the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth, Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration, State Secondary Complex, 7150 Harris Drive, P.O. Box 30644, Lansing, Michigan 48909, phone 1-800-858-0397.