

Case 285. 49-year-old co-owner of a tree service died due to a 40-foot fall when the top of the elm tree to which he was tied off broke away from the tree after the tree trunk was struck by a swinging tree branch.

A 49-year-old male co-owner of a tree service died due to a 40-foot fall when the top of the elm tree to which he was tied off broke away from the tree after the tree trunk was struck by a swinging tree branch. The tree had an approximate diameter of 36 inches at its base. The decedent was wearing his full fall protection and personal protective equipment – helmet, safety glasses, hearing protection, Weaver Model 1033 safety belt/saddle with a steel-lined safety rope/lifeline, and tree climbing spurs on his boots. He was tied in at the crotch of the tree. The decedent was cutting the remaining branch, which was approximately 14-16 inches in diameter and approximately 25 feet in length. The branch he was cutting was controlled by his coworker. The rope ran from the branch through steel guides/loops at the point where the decedent was tied in and then down to the coworker on the ground. The decedent made his final cut. As the cut was finished the branch swung slightly, the base of the branch slid back into the trunk of the tree and the ends of the branch became entangled in a neighbor's tree. The decedent asked his coworker to give more slack on the rope. When the coworker allowed for more slack, the branch fell and swung again back into the tree trunk. This shock of the quick stop snapped the tree trunk approximately 15 feet below where the decedent was tied in, causing both the top portion of the tree and the deceased to fall 40 feet to the ground. His coworker attended to the decedent while another individual called for emergency response. The decedent was transported to a local hospital where he died later in the day. The firm did not have a bucket truck.

MIOSHA Occupational Safety and Health Division issued the following Serious and Other-than-Serious citations at the conclusion of its investigation.

SERIOUS: TREE TRIMMING AND REMOVAL, PART 53, RULE 5334(1):

When topping, equipment such as a crane, shall be used to lower branches and limbs if the tree cannot stand the strain:

Employer did not evaluate the tree to ensure it could take the strain of branch being removed aloft, tree removal.

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 inpatient hospitalization of three or more employees was not made within eight hours after the occurrence to the Michigan Department of Energy, Labor and Economic Growth, Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration, State Secondary Complex, 7150 Harris Drive, P.O. Box 30644, Lansing, MI 48909, phone 1-800-858-0397.

