

Case 396. 28-year-old tree trimmer died when he fell approximately 40 feet when his Weaver Cougar Positioning Saddle Model 1075 rope bridge failed while ascending a tree.

A 28-year-old male tree trimmer died when he fell approximately 40 feet when his Weaver Cougar Positioning Saddle Model 1075 rope bridge failed while ascending a tree. The decedent's employer was contracted by a homeowner to remove some dead limbs and cable two oak trees together for support so the tree closest to the house would not fall and damage the home. The decedent was a member of a three person crew. After arriving at the site and developing a work plan, with their backs to one another, the decedent and one of the coworkers were ascending the two oak trees to be cabled together to begin installing the cable and remove a chain that the homeowner installed between the two trees. The decedent was wearing a Weaver Cougar Positioning Saddle Model 1075 manufactured in 2009. As he was ascending, the saddle rope bridge, which was the equipment's original 14.5-inch bridge rope, broke near the middle of the rope; one piece measured 8 inches and the other piece measured 6.5 inches. The decedent fell approximately 20 feet and struck the edge of the house roof and then fell approximately 20 feet to a wood deck, landing on his back. The ground man witnessed the fall. He ran to his truck to call for emergency response. The coworker repelled down the tree, and with the homeowner, administered CPR until emergency response arrived. A bucket truck could not be used for the work because of the location of the septic system in the homeowner's backyard. The responding police noted that his climbing harness appeared to exhibit several areas of wear to both the bridge rope at its attachment points to the saddle rings (the bridge rope was so worn in the areas which were tied to the metal rings that the black and yellow coloring of the rope was gone and the under gray rope fibers were visible) as well as the harness in general (e.g. right black thigh support strap was torn and broken). The decedent was wearing a hard hat during the climb, but based on the lack of apparent impact damage to the hard hat, responding police indicated it most likely came off of his head as he fell. The decedent died several days later from complications of a blunt force head injury.

MIOSHA General Industry Safety and Health Division issued the following Serious citations to the employer at the conclusion of its investigation:

SERIOUS: GI Part 53, Tree Trimming and Removal

- 408.15311(b): An employer shall not allow a tool or equipment to be used which is not guarded according to state standards, has a defective guard or is otherwise unsafe.

A positioning saddle showed areas on the saddle approximately 3 inches in length where material was worn and torn, along with excessive fraying on the rope bridge at both ends around the knot and attachment points, and failed during ascension of a tree on a contracted tree trimming and cabling operation at a private residence.

- 408.15313(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 positioning saddle was not inspected before it was used to ascend a tree to perform a contracted tree trimming and cabling operation at a private residence.