

Case 417. 24-year-old male tree trimming company owner died when a large branch struck him while trimming a tree.

A 24-year-old male tree trimming company owner died when a large branch struck him while trimming a tree. The decedent was approximately 30 feet above the ground removing the upper section of a 55-foot poplar tree (topping the tree). He was aloft using climbing gear and tied off with a saddle. Approximately 10 feet above the deceased, one end of a rope was tied to the tree section being cut. The other end of the rope was attached to the rear bumper/hitch of a pickup truck to keep it from falling on and to pull it away from a private residence. The decedent had notched the trunk and was making the back cut on the 19-inch diameter trunk when the saw became pinched approximately 12 inches into the tree. He instructed his ground person to allow some slack in the rope so he could remove the saw. As the vehicle was being backed up to loosen the rope tension, a 25-foot section of the tree above his head kicked back and fell on the opposite side of him, placing him between the falling tree top and the rope attached to the pickup truck. The weight of the falling tree section caused the rope to pull the deceased backward from where his saddle was tied off and continued with massive force across his abdomen, chest and head. Emergency response was called, but neither EMS nor the fire department had any means to gain access to the decedent. The local electrical utility and department of public works were contacted to respond with a bucket truck. The decedent was declared dead at the scene.

MIOSHA General Industry Safety and Health Division did not issue a citation – the deceased was the owner of the company and the company ceased to exist at the time of his death.