

Case 429. 46-year-old journeyman tree trimmer died from a 35- to 45- foot fall when the knot used to attach his climbing rope to his climbing saddle untied.

A 46-year-old journeyman tree trimmer died from a 35 foot fall when the knot used to attach his climbing rope to his climbing saddle untied. The decedent and his coworker (with additional 2-person trimming crews in the area) were performing line clearance tree trimming work in a residential neighborhood. Prior to beginning work in the morning, the decedent discussed waiting for additional individuals to help trim the incident B-4 maple tree because it was so large. The crew trimmed one tree prior to lunch, and then after lunch, another job briefing was held by the decedent and his coworker about the maple tree. After the job briefing which documented that all equipment and unique hazards had been assessed, the decedent climbed up to set his rope and trimmed his way down the front side of the tree and around the cross arms of the power pole. The decedent had an insulated pole pruner with him in the tree to trim branches that were near the lines and a chain saw. The ground man was in an adjacent yard throwing brush over the fence when he heard branches snapping and a loud “thud”. Looking toward the sound, he saw the decedent on the ground. The ground man called 911 and ran for help to a nearby company crew. The homeowner arrived at that moment and helped at the scene. It is hypothesized that the knot he had chosen to tie to his saddle, thought to be a Bowline knot, had become untied because it had not been finished with, or did not have, an adequate stopper knot on the tail end. Subsequent investigation supporting this hypothesis found that the ends of all the other ropes attached to the saddle had black electrical tape wrapped around the end. The end of the rope that had been tied to the saddle was frayed and had only remnants of electrical tape on the rope fibers.

MIOSHA General Industry Safety Division issued the following Serious citation to the employer at the conclusion of its investigation.

SERIOUS: ELECTRIC POWER GENERATION, TRANSMISSION, AND DISTRIBUTION, GI PART 86, RULE 1910.269[r](8): Each employee shall be tied in with a climbing rope and safety saddle when the employee is working above the ground in a tree, unless he or she is ascending into the tree.

It was not ensured that an employee remained tied in with a climbing rope while working in a tree. An employee sustained a fatal fall from approximately 35 feet on *date*, when his climbing rope came untied from his climbing saddle. *MIFACE removed the date from the citation.*