

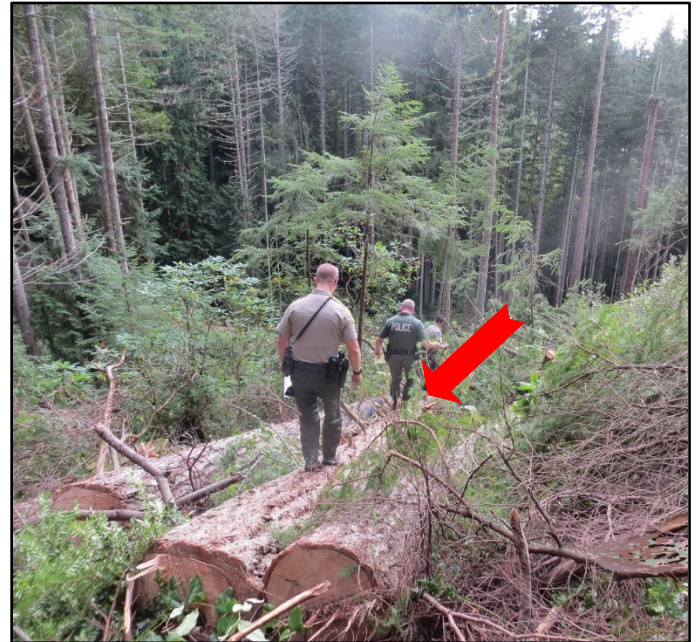
## Timber Cutter Struck by Falling Fir Tree

**Task:** Falling and bucking timber

**Occupation:** Cutter

**Release Date:** December 5, 2016

In September 2014, a 24-year-old cutter died when he was struck by a tree felled by his employer. Previously the cutter had worked for four years on a rigging crew. He wanted to learn to cut timber and had been working directly under the supervision of his new employer for one month. The employer had cut timber for nearly 30 years. The employer was contracted to cut timber while another company was running the cable operation at the site. On the day of the incident, the cutter and his employer were working on a brushy 45-degree slope with large fir trees. They were working as fast as they could because the rigging crew was catching up to them. As they worked their way up the hill, the strip narrowed. The employer decided that they needed to team up, otherwise they would be working too close to each other. The employer felled a tree and told the cutter to buck it. As the cutter was bucking the felled tree, the employer made an undercut in a fir uphill from the cutter. The employer then noticed the cutter walking uphill and behind him, away from the tree he had been bucking. Believing that the cutter was out of the fall zone, he felled the tree. He then felled a third tree alongside the others. Next he proceeded to put an undercut and then a backcut deep enough to install two wedges in a fourth tree. About 15 minutes had passed since he had felled the second tree and he had not seen the cutter, so he went to look for him. He discovered that the cutter had been struck and fatally injured by the second felled tree. The cutter was located 69 feet downhill from the second tree's stump. Five-foot brush in the area may have hampered site lines.



Incident scene showing the three felled fir trees. The middle tree struck the cutter, fatally injuring him. The arrow shows where the cutter was bucking the log when the tree struck him.

### Safety Requirements

- Cutters must give audible warning when falling trees and ensure that all employees are out of reach of the tree. See [WAC 296-54-53910\(4\)\(b\)](#)
- The undercut must not be made while other workers are in an area into which the tree could fall. See [WAC 296-54-53910\(13\)](#)
- The employer must develop a formal accident prevention program, tailored to the needs of the particular logging operation and to the type of hazards involved. The program must be implemented in a manner that is effective in practice. See [WAC 296-54-515\(1\)](#)

### Recommended Safe Practices

- When cutters can no longer keep a two-tree distance between them and decide to team up, they must agree to a plan that does not put either of them at risk. For example, both cutters stand side-by-side while one cutter falls two trees. They then both buck the felled trees.
- Communication between cutters is essential for safety. Always know where your partner is located. Never cut a tree before making sure that your partner is in the clear. Tell your partner if you need to go somewhere, and get confirmation from them that they understand your intentions before you leave for another location.
- Ensure that new cutters are thoroughly trained in all communication protocols.

### Resources

- Accident Prevention Program for Cutting Operations:  
[www.lni.wa.gov/Safety/TrainingPrevention/Programs/files/LSICuttingOperationsSampleAPP.doc](http://www.lni.wa.gov/Safety/TrainingPrevention/Programs/files/LSICuttingOperationsSampleAPP.doc)
- In the Clear training packet from the Washington Logger Safety Initiative (LSI):  
[www.lni.wa.gov/Main/LoggerSafety/Pdfs/TrainingPacketInTheClearCutting.pdf](http://www.lni.wa.gov/Main/LoggerSafety/Pdfs/TrainingPacketInTheClearCutting.pdf)
- Video: Faller recounts how he worked for 37 years accident free:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dgd\\_wyckyXw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dgd_wyckyXw)

