



FOREST RESOURCES ASSOCIATION INC.

600 JEFFERSON PLAZA, SUITE 350
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND 20852

PHONE: 301/838-9385

FAX: 301/838-9481

SAFETY ALERT

07-S-6

FORKED ASH TREE “EXPLODES,” INJURING CUTTER

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www.forestresources.org/members/serpub/07-S-6.html

BACKGROUND: It was the end of a cloudy fall day in the Appalachians, with scattered showers nearby (but not on the logging site). The owner told the cutter to get one last tree before finishing up for the day. It was a forked ash tree with one fork remaining to be limbed.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS: The 44-year-old cutter had about 10 years’ experience in all aspects of logging, but he was least experienced with timber cutting. He was wearing all his safety equipment including chain saw pants, hard hat with eye and hearing protection, and chain saw-resistant boots. He had previously participated in a recognized chain saw safety training class.

UNSAFE ACTS AND CONDITION: The cutter hooked up the ash tree and cable-skidded it down toward the main road on the hillside. He turned the skidder onto the road, but he released the mainline tension short of the road and inadvertently placed the ash (a tree known for “explosive” wood under tension) in a bind. He carried the saw up the hill to trim the remaining fork. The cutter positioned himself between the forks of the ash tree.



ACCIDENT: Before the cutter even began to top the fork, it suddenly “exploded” free, quickly hitting the cutter just below the knee. The accident happened near the landing, and the cutter was able to get the owner’s help. He was driven to the local hospital for treatment.

INJURY: The hospital MRI revealed that the bone below the knee was broken; it would require minor surgery to repair, and the cutter would miss approximately 2 months before returning to work.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CORRECTION: The cutter should have pulled the tree all the way down to the skid road before he completed trimming the tree. The cutter should have been able to recognize the side of the tree from which he would have been safe to stand in case something went wrong while trimming. His lack of experience prevented him from recognizing the risk that the ash tree under tension presented.

An experienced cutter should be ready to assist and advise with training a new employee, so high-risk behavior can be recognized and corrected. Basic instruction in recognizing hazardous situations should be given to all woods employees. Workers should also be aware that there can be a tendency to relax safety precautions at the end of the day.

Reviewed by:
Rick Meyer
Appalachian/Southeastern Region Manager

Please follow equipment manufacturers’ recommendations for safe operation and maintenance procedures.