

Safety Alert- June 2015

Falling Debris hits Manual Tree Faller

Background:

A manual faller had been instructed to fell an additional strip of trees to widen a previous road lining operation. The faller was felling his third tree of the morning and had completed the back cut, as the tree started to go he has looked up while retreating and was struck by a falling limb to the face and shoulder.

Potential Severity:

The faller doesn't remember the incident clearly, but fortunately for him he had his radio on him, the tree falling safety plan operated as it should, and he received prompt assistance from other members of the crew.



(an example of an overhead hazard left by a previous operation)

He was taken to hospital and monitored for concussion while receiving stitches to the laceration to his face. The faller has been off work to recuperate following the concussion, and has now returned to work.

If the branch had been any bigger this could have resulted in very severe injuries.

Contributing factors:

Assessment – In this case the faller has not seen the 'sailor' as part of his assessment. This reinforces the need to assess each tree to look for potential hazards, and to follow the 5 STEPS correctly – Site Assessment, Tree Assessment, Escape Route, Practice Safe felling techniques, Step back and observe. Where the hazard has been identified a control for it is to be implemented.

Previous operations – The edge of the road lining operation had been identified as having numerous 'sailors' and debris hung up in the standing tree branches. It is likely that the previous road lining operation may have created some of these overhead hazards by machine felling back into the stand. Although not necessarily the cause in this instance, it could be a contributing factor.

Learnings:

No operation should create hazards that will effect subsequent operations. Where it is possible during road lining operations trees should not be felled back into trees that will be left standing, and any hazards that are created must be eliminated wherever possible. If a hazard can't be eliminated it must be reported, mapped, and built into the site specific hazard register for the next operation, and appropriate controls implemented.