

Knife Prevents More Serious Injury



The space between the cuts is where the knife was.

On July 22, 2011 a Forest Service crew was engaged in a hazard tree removal project along a forest road not only to make the road safe for travel but to also provide a safe wood cutting area for the public. Due to the smaller diameter, lower height of the trees and openness of the stand it was a good site to give "A" level operators experience.

After looking at a couple of small diameter trees leaning toward the road, one of the "A" fallers asked a "B" sawyer, who was not directly involved in falling trees that day, for advice and assistance. After discussing the tree the "A" sawyer began the operation.

After watching the "A" faller place the undercut in the tree the "B" faller could see that the saw, a Stihl 361 with a 28" bar, which the "A" faller had been using was not sharp and cutting poorly. He then had the "A" faller switch to a second saw which was Stihl 440 with a 32" bar and full skip chain that was very sharp.

The tree being fell was a small diameter Lodge Pole Pine and with the undercut there was not enough room in the backcut for the bar and a wedge at the same time. The "A" faller cut to the point that they thought the tree would fall with the assistance of a wedge. The operator stopped the saw and they inserted a wedge and drove it till it hit the back of the hinge wood but the tree did not go over.

At this point the "B" faller told the "A" faller to cut a little more off the hinge wood beside the wedge on which was the "A" faller's weak side. The "B" faller then stepped back to what he felt was a safe distance to observe the cutting procedure.

The "A" faller then inserted the saw into the backcut and felt for clearance before starting to cut. As he started the cut, contact was made either with the wedge or hinge wood causing a violent kickback spinning him around in the direction of the "B" faller and striking him in the left thigh.

Due to the fact that he was not cutting that day the "B" faller was not wearing chaps, he did however have a knife in his left pocket which was struck by the saw bar limiting the severity of the injury.

What Went Well

The crew had an emergency evacuation plan and a fully qualified EMT with a full trauma kit who was able to provide immediate medical response. Upon examination they were able to determine that the cut was shallow, not life threatening and able to field dress the wound for transportation to the local hospital.

The crew was able to transport the injured employee to hospital.

The EMT was able to monitor the injured employee's vitals and communicate them to the hospital during transport.

The "A" faller recognized the need and ask for assistance.

Lessons Learned

Instructors and other personal involved in all saw operations that may be in close proximity to operating saws should also be wearing all PPE required for saw operators.

Instructors or anyone assisting a faller should be clear of any potential kickback zone or at the end of a predetermined escape route before sawing is resumed.

When switching out equipment such as to a larger saw or longer bar, take the time to familiarize yourself with its feel and clearance requirements before resuming operations.

When inserting bar into existing cut be very conscious of the kickback points.

The complexity of a felling operation can quickly change and if there is a need to change your original felling plan or procedure, stop and re-assess the situation as if just starting the felling operation.