

Rapid Lesson Sharing

Event Type: Chainsaw Kick-Back Cut Injury

Date: June 18, 2020

Location: Fishlake National Forest
Utah

Chainsaw Kick-Back Incident

The sawyer shut down the saw, taking time to assess the situation further. The sawyer then became aware of a cut to his pants. Upon pulling up the pant leg, he noticed a two-inch horizontal cut, just above the top of the boot line.

While prepositioned in Central Utah, the crew was tasked with Forest project work consisting of clearing aspen patches of all subalpine fir and other conifer species up to 15-inches diameter breast height (DBH). During this time, a sawyer and swamper were completing routine chainsaw operations when the sawyer cut himself.

The Incident

Around 1200, the sawyer was preparing to cut down a three-inch conifer sapling. The sawyer positioned himself into place with his left leg forward and right leg back and proceeded to cut the base of a sapling (see photos).

As the sawyer placed the tip of the running chainsaw bar next to the sapling, the tip contacted a log that was resting against the tree, which caused the chainsaw to kick back abruptly. As the saw bar kicked back, it contacted the lower portion of the sawyer's protective chainsaw chaps.

The fast-moving chain cut into the chaps, causing the chaps to be pulled quickly toward the inside of the sawyer's lower left leg, allowing for the lower leg to become exposed to the still-moving chain. Initially, the sawyer had thought he had only cut the chainsaw chaps.

The swamper noticed what had happened and asked if the sawyer was all right. The sawyer shut down the

These three photos show the sequence of events that occurred in this chainsaw kickback incident.

This is a recreation of the event in the exact location where this incident occurred.



saw, taking time to assess the situation further. The sawyer then became aware of a cut to his pants. Upon pulling up the pant leg, he noticed a two-inch horizontal cut, just above the top of the boot line. The swamper immediately contacted their crew captain to report the situation and asked for an EMT to meet them at the trucks.

Initial Medical Attention

The sawyer and swamper walked to the truck and were met by the crew EMT. The EMT immediately assessed the injury, cleaned the wound and bandaged for transport. During the injury assessment, the EMT did state the injury would need further care. The amount of time it took for the sawyer to leave the site of the injury and reach the truck for medical care was less than 5 minutes.

Transport and Care

The sawyer was transported to a local hospital via crew captain and truck. The Forest Hospital Liaison was waiting at the hospital to help with any further administrative assistance. Understanding the agency medical treatment process, the Forest Liaison ensured that the proper paperwork was received and filled out for the sawyer.

The sawyer was administered into the Emergency Room and received eight stitches.

Lessons

Body Positioning

Always be aware of where your body is positioned in relation to the chainsaw. Ensure that no part of your body—or other personnel—are in line with the direction the chainsaw bar will travel if a kickback situation should occur.

Chainsaw Bar Tip

Always be aware of where the tip of the chainsaw bar is with regards to other objects which are not intended to be cut.

Chainsaw Chap Usage

Chainsaw chaps do work when properly worn and fitted. Tighten chap leg straps so chaps are snug around legs. If chaps are worn loosely, they will not be able to do their job. If there is a chain strike, the chain will shift the chaps to the side, expose the legs, and result in a cut.

Two similar injury incidents—loose chaps pulled by chain—occurred last year:

[Kootenai National Forest Chainsaw Cut \(2019\)](#)

[Beeskov Fire Chainsaw Cut and Medevac \(2019\)](#)

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