

# Rapid Lesson Sharing

**Event Type:** Felling Hazard Tree into Civilian Vehicle

**Date:** Sept. 20, 2013

**Location:** Hazard Tree Removal Project, Boise National Forest – Idaho

## Narrative

On September 20, 2013, a crew was working on a roadside hazard tree removal project along Forest Service 582 Road on the Boise National Forest. All work crew members were motivated to finish the project that day. They split into three separate groups—two with three people and one with two people.



Top Photo

The vehicle hit by the 3-inch/30-foot tall tree during hazard tree felling operations along Forest Service 582 Road on the Boise National Forest.

Bottom Photo

Shows the minor dent that resulted from this tree strike.  
No injuries occurred.



I was on the two-person team. My spotter was also the senior on the project that day. We had until 1500 to finish and return to our station for our daily physical training. Throughout the day, my partner and I would take turns felling trees and road-guarding for each other on the northern most end of the project area. Around 1400, the group located to our south called on my spotter for assistance with a tree that was too complex for each of their individual comfort levels. He told me he would be right back, then proceeded to travel on foot south down the road to assist them.

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*“I tried  
to hold the  
tree back—with no  
success.”*

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Left alone in our section with only three more trees to tie-in my section and take a bump on the front group—and being anxious to finish the project and move forward—I made the decision to continue felling these remaining trees in our section.

As I was working, a “civilian” car drove by me southbound on the 582 Road. I called out “Vehicle” on the radio. This message was acknowledged by each of the other groups. The car proceeded to the end of the project area, turned around and continued back northbound through the project area toward my section. Due to the noise from my chainsaw, I did not hear the other groups call out that the car was coming back in my direction.

As I was felling the final tree in my section (3-inch DBH/30-feet tall), a white Subaru Outback stopped in the direct path of the falling tree. I tried to hold the tree back—with no success. The tree struck the vehicle’s driver’s-side roof—leaving a small dent. I rushed over to the car to make sure nobody was injured and that everything was OK. I then called my supervisor to report the incident.

When my supervisor arrived, I explained what had happened. He called our crew supervisor on the radio and asked him to come out to the scene. When our crew supervisor arrived, the District duty officer was informed, who informed our home unit’s law enforcement officer. An accident report was filled out on scene by both the private party and us. The private party proceeded back to their camp site, where law enforcement personnel met them later to fill out his report.

**Lessons**

1. Road guards should be in place at each end of a roadside cutting project.

A. In this incident, road guards were with individual saw teams—not placed at each end of project.

2. Sawyers should never be cutting alone.

A. In this incident, the spotter of the two-member team left to help another group. This left the cutter alone with no spotter. He was not told to stop cutting.

B. The spotter should have sent someone over from the three-member group he was helping. This person could have then assisted the sawyer who had been temporarily left alone. Or, the spotted should have told his sawyer to cease cutting until he came back.

3. Work production should NEVER come before safety.

A. Wanting to finish clearing his area, when left alone, the sawyer did not stop cutting. Therefore, the sawyer did not adhere to the tailgate safety meeting that his crew had done earlier in the season for the hazard removal project.

When performing roadside hazard tree removal projects in the future, a road guard will be designated at each end of the project area. When a vehicle comes, the road guard will stop the vehicle, call the vehicle out over the radio—then await vocal acknowledgement from each group before allowing the vehicle to proceed. Sawyers will not continue felling operations until the vehicle clears the area.



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**Submitted By**  
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