

Rapid Lesson Sharing

Event Type: Felling Accident

Date: April 6, 2016

Location: Prescribed fire slop-over on the Boston Mountain Ranger District, Ozark-St. Francis National Forests, Arkansas

NARRATIVE

During mop-up operations on a prescribed fire slop-over on the Boston Mountain Ranger District a sawyer was struck by a portion of a felled snag.

The operations started out with a thorough briefing on the weather and expected strong winds that were to occur later in the day. The objective was to cut all burning and smoking snags “a good ways in” due to a predicted wind shift that was to occur.

A large group of sawyers were divided into cutting pairs. Their objective was to get trees on the ground safely before these higher winds occurred.

This particular sawyer had cut 20-30 snags. They were all relatively sound (held together). Most were wet on the inside, therefore just burning superficially.

The sawyer approached the next snag and sized it up. First, the sawyer cut another small snag just up the hill to eliminate its hazard potential. The ground was relatively level. The terrain was gentle. However, the footing was somewhat questionable due to the chert composition of the ground. (The footing was compared to walking on baseballs.)

This snag was a red oak, approximately 8-9 inches in diameter and 35-feet tall. It was burning approximately ten feet up the bole. The snag was very solid where the cut was applied—all the bark was gone, leaving good solid wood.

Back-Cut Goes Through Hinge Wood

The sawyer put in an open face-cut. When the sawyer applied the back-cut it went through the hinge wood. The tree rapidly began falling. It struck a green tree a few feet away, causing the snag to fold up in the middle and sent the top directly back at the stump.



The sawyer's back-cut went through this snag's holding wood, resulting in a portion of the snag hitting the sawyer.



The sawyer's injuries included contusions to the right forearm, right bicep, and chest area.



The sawyer traveled approximately 7 feet down the escape route when they saw the top coming and put their arm up to be protected from its impact.

The top one foot of the tree appeared to break over sawyer's arm and fall to the ground. The rest of the snag skinned down the sawyer's right bicep, impacting the sawyer's lower ribs on the right side.

This blow was forceful enough to knock the sawyer down and knocked the wind out of the sawyer, leaving contusions on the right forearm, right bicep, and right chest area. The sawyer was able to walk the line out and meet up with the work leader and an EMT on site.

The EMT examined the affected areas and discussed the injuries with the sawyer. It was decided to monitor the sawyer during the rest of the work period for signs of trouble breathing or other injuries. No treatment was applied.

Consider the following:

- ✓ The snag's fire-weakened condition.
- ✓ Cutting hinge off: Loss of control of the direction of the snag's fall.
- ✓ Using a large, powerful saw with a long bar can be tricky on smaller trees where finesse is required.
- ✓ Get quickly as far down escape route as possible.

- ✓ Experienced operator with proper training and certification.
- ✓ Operator was wearing full PPE for fire and sawyer operations.
- ✓ Followed proper protocol when injured— notifying Burn Boss.
- ✓ Wounds were self-assessed and followed-up by EMT evaluation.
- ✓ E-safety process was initiated upon return to office.

This RLS was submitted by:
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