Pruning Safety Fatality File



Case No. 1 – Electrocution

A 21-year-old tree trimmer (the victim) was working as part of a five-man crew assigned to trim trees along an electric utility right-of-way in a residential area. Numerous high- and low-voltage lines (including electric, telephone, and cable TV lines) ran through the trees at various heights in this area. Two tree trimmers were working in the trees while the other three worked at ground level. The victim was trimming a large branch when he leaned back to prune some small branches above his head. The back of the victim’s neck came into contact with a 7,200-volt power line and he was electrocuted.

Case No. 2 Fall

A 27-year-old tree trimmer (the victim) was working as part of a four-man crew to remove dead trees from a private home in a semi-rural area. The crew had been on the site for 2 days and had removed four large trees. They were working on the fifth tree and had cut off all of the tree limbs. Even though each tree was checked for rot by tapping on the trunk, the crew was unaware of the presence of wood wasps in the upper trunk—a sign of rot. At midmorning, the victim (wearing a saddle belt attached to a cloth lanyard) climbed the tree to cut it away in sections. While ascending the tree, the victim reportedly realized that the tree was more damaged than expected, stopped climbing at approximately 35 feet, and tied off at that height. The rotted tree had a list of approximately 10 to 15 degrees, and as the top section was cut away, the tree bent with it. As the tree sprang back to its original position, the backlash was strong enough to fracture the trunk 6 feet below the cut area where the victim had tied his lanyard. The tree trimmer died when he fell to the ground with the tree section, which landed on top of him.