

Forestry Bulletin

Fatal Accidents in Logging, Forestry and Tree Work Year Ending 30 June 1997

Nine fatalities in forestry work were reported to OSH during the year ending 30 June 1997.

Here's what happened.

Logging

- The carriage and winch was being used to hold the tension on the skyline of a Wyssen operation while the tension device was being adjusted. The carriage suddenly released, slid down the skyline and the hook struck one of the workers.
- A loader driver reached from the cab of his excavator type loader to end mark logs. His jacket became entangled in the slew lever and as he leaned out his leg forced the lever to activate. The cab revolved and crushed the operator between the loader and logs.
- A log skidder was descending a skid road. The machine ran off the road and rolled over several times. The operator was thrown out and suffered severe head injuries. He died the next day.
- A farmer was taking offal to a pit adjacent to an area where trees were being felled. A tree being felled struck the farmer as he drove past.
- A skidder rolled at breakout. The operator was thrown out and crushed. At the time of the fatality the operator was completing a drag and there is no requirement under the safety codes to wear a safety belt or restraint until the drag is complete and the machine ready to drive directly to the skids. It appears that the positioning of the skidder may have contributed to the roll-over.

Land clearing

- Scattered totara trees were being felled on partly developed farmland. Incorrect assessment of the lean resulted in a tree falling away from the intended direction of fall and trapping the feller as he tried to use an inadequate escape path.

Portable plant

- The blade sheared off an operating portable sawmill and struck the operator causing multiple fatal injuries.

Firewood

- A farmer was hauling firewood trees up a gully. The trees were attached at a high point on the tractor. The tractor over-turned backwards and the farmer was crushed. The tractor had no safety frame.

Charity/club/casual

- A self-employed horse trainer was cutting windblown willows away from a fence at the racecourse. The old chainsaw he was using was poorly sharpened and lacked modern safety features including a safety mitt. The saw kicked back from a cut and caused fatal injuries to the left side of the neck.

Now let's look at the causes of fatalities reported to OSH since the Health and Safety in Employment Act commenced on 1 April 1993.

Cause	Operation							Total
	Logging	Land preparation	Tree work	Commercial firewood	Portable plant	Firewood	Charity/ Club	
Branch/top	2	-	-	-	-	2	-	4
Trees	12	3	1	2	-	4	1	23
Logs	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Crawler	4	1	-	-	-	-	-	5
Wheel	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	2
Skidder	2	-	-	1	-	-	-	3
Loader	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	5
Hauler	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Chainsaw	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Plant	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	2
	30	4	1	3	1	8	2	49

Overall, most fatalities were people felling trees (59%) or operating mobile plant (28%).

Felling and Plant Operating Fatalities

Recently, an OSH forestry taskforce examined forestry work fatalities from 1980 to 1996.

Here are some of the facts:

- One occupational health specialist, Dr Tom Garland, said : “If they (forestry workers) all worked in a single factory and a person was killed every six or seven weeks, it is doubtful whether the factory would continue to operate”.
- If you work in logging, you are 70 times more likely to have a fatal accident than the average New Zealand worker.
- Based on total production, the highest fatality rate is in the southern North Island where there are the greatest numbers of small forest (woodlot) harvesting.
- The central North Island, where there is the highest number of corporate (big company) forests and highest number of mechanised harvesting, has the lowest fatality rate. This fatality rate has fallen since the 1980s.
- Poor skill of the worker was the main factor in the fatalities.
- Those most at risk were fallers, (56%) and machine operators (23%).

Felling trees

Look back at Bulletin Nos. 109: *Felling* and 112: *Delimiting and Heading Off*. These two bulletins have practical commonsense hints detailing ways of

reducing fatalities and injuries that occur during these two operations. If you haven't got copies, get hold of your local inspector (forestry) and get one from him or write to Lester Bell, Occupational Safety & Health, PO Box 3705, Wellington.

Operating plant

The next most dangerous job is operating mobile plant. Being thrown out or jumping out at rollover and then being crushed by the machine is the most common cause of fatalities. Why are people thrown out? **Simple—they don't wear their seat belt or restraint device.**

Industry agreed that wearing of seat belts or using a restraint device should be compulsory from 1 August 1992. **What's happened?**

No seat belts or restraints were worn in 21 recent fatal rollovers studied. In four cases, a seat belt or restraint may not have prevented the fatality due to the number of rolls the machine did. In all other cases, however, by wearing a seat belt or restraint, a fatality would have been avoided.

There is anecdotal evidence that skidders, in particular, are sometimes required to operate on slopes or conditions beyond the capacity of the machine and perhaps the ability or confidence level of the operator. Section 27.3 of the current logging safety code details steps the industry have agreed shall be taken to sort these things out.

In a future Bulletin we will look at mobile plant operating safety.