

Struck by falling tree – Inspection #1088700

A **70 year old male employee** was fatally injured when a tree fell striking him in the head. On the day of the accident, four employees were cleaning around trees located next to a High School's practice football field. The employees were using a John Deere 310sk backhoe to pull ivy, leaves, and accumulated vegetation away from the trees. After the backhoe dislodged the vegetation, the employees would pick up the vegetation for disposal. The employees had cleared one side (south) of a rotten tree, and started on the other side when the accident occurred. When the backhoe pulled on the vegetation on the north side of the rotten tree, it fell to the west side striking the victim. The tree was approximately 25-30 feet tall, and stuck the victim who was standing approximately 15-20 feet away from the tree. The employees were not gathering vegetation for disposal at the time, but watching the backhoe as it removed vegetation from around the north side of the rotten tree. The victim died several hours later due to trauma to the head and body.

Violation(s) as Originally Issued

A complete inspection was conducted at the accident scene. Some of the items cited may not directly relate to the fatality.

Violation 1 Item 1

TCA 50-3-105(1)	Each employer did not furnish to each of its employees conditions of employment and a place of employment free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious injury or harm to its employees in that employee were exposed to physical harm such as being struck by falling objects: The employer failed to provide employees with the necessary safety training required to protect employees from the recognized hazards associated with tree trimming and the removal of overgrown vegetation during grounds maintenance. A feasible and acceptable abatement method to protect employees from the impact of tree debris and felled trees is to provide them with the following instructional training and required guidelines: a) Keep unprotected or non-essential workers at least two three lengths beyond the expected/suspect drop zones during tree/vegetation clearing; b) during felling, designate the work areas so that trees cannot fall into adjacent occupied work areas. Adjacent occupied work areas should be a least two tree lengths from the tree being felled, allow more if it is a reasonably foreseeable that the tree might roll or slide; c) Always plan a clear path of retreat before cutting; d) Remove/cut down dead trees prior to beginning all ground-level vegetation removal; e) determine the felling direction and how to deal with forward, back, and/or side lean; f) Wear the proper protective equipment for the head, eyes, face hands, etc.
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Photo 1 of 1 – Photo of the backhoe and where the tree struck the victim designated by the white arrow.