

# SAFETY NOTES

Department of Consumer & Business Services  
Oregon Occupational Safety & Health Division  
Salem, OR 97310

## Fatality Report

Accident type ..... Electrocution  
Industry ..... Reforestation/timber thinning  
Employee job title ..... Owner, crew member



### **Description of accident**

A crew of 10 was finishing a late-August day of timber thinning and brush cutting on a tract of timber. At about 3 p.m., one of the crew fell a small-diameter tree that struck and caught on a power line as it fell. The owner of the company, who was working nearby, reached out with his chain saw to cut the butt end of the hung-up tree so that it would dislodge from the power line and fall to the ground.

His chain saw exploded upon contact with the electrified tree, which carried a current of 115,000 volts. Flames from the burning saw engulfed the victim. The crew member who had dropped the tree onto the power line had been shocked as electrical current flowed through the tree, the ground, and his saw. He was able to drop his saw, which also caught fire.

A third crew member tried again to rescue the owner, after having been knocked down by electricity in his first attempt. Another crew member dumped a jug of water on the first faller's burning saw and received an electrical shock. He left the saw to rescue the faller. Fire began to spread as the rescuers dragged the victim and the other man to safer locations, and some of the crew began fighting the fire.

The rescuer who first reached the victim began CPR, but determined that the man was dead, and stopped CPR. When emergency medical personnel arrived, two employees received medical treatment and were taken to a hospital. The worker who fell the tree onto the power line and reported having been shocked, did not seek medical treatment. Fire fighters arrived at the scene to relieve the crew of its fire-fighting efforts.

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### **Investigation findings**

Investigation revealed that the owner had not notified the power company that his crew would be falling trees within 10 feet of power lines. Employees of the reforestation/thinning crew had not been properly trained to fall trees; most of the trees that had been fallen in that tract had been fallen toward the power lines. No precautions had been taken to prevent trees from being fallen onto power lines. Also, the fallers dropped trees within one tree-length of other workers (must be at least two tree-lengths apart), and all of the trees fallen by one faller lacked undercuts and backcuts. Interviews with employees revealed that trees had been fallen onto power lines on three other occasions and that the owner was on site on those occasions. The crew had not been trained in fire-suppression techniques.

### **Applicable standards**

Citations were issued for the following serious violations:

- OAR 437-006-0355(15) The employer must ensure that all precautions have been taken when falling trees near power lines.
- OAR 437-006-0028(3) The employer must notify the owner of high-voltage power lines when planning to work within 10 feet of a power line.
- OAR 437-006-0015(4) The employer must provide adequate training.
- OAR 437-006-0080(1)(a) The employer must provide fire-suppression training for employees expected to conduct fire suppression.
- OAR 437-006-0355(1) The employer must ensure that the required clearance (between or among employees) is maintained at all times when trees are being fallen.