

PROBLEMS OF SAFETY IN TREE WORK¹

by Robert R. Herder

The problems of safety in tree work are, in themselves, not very new and, from the standpoint of compassion for our fellow men, no more *important* than they ever were.

But, because of the increasing complexity of the equipment we use, and the ballooning number of government regulations we're saddled with, the work to achieve the desired end is skyrocketing, and the percentage of time expended in this effort, compared to time spent on the other demands of running a business (which translates to earning a living) is on the increase.

In many areas of accident prevention the problems and solutions are *no different* than they ever

were, and OSHA demands no more of us than running our jobs accordingly. In other areas, however, there *are* new things to learn to *do*; and shotgun regulations; and regulations which ignore reality and demand time and money and seem to produce little benefit to the people whose safety and well being we're trying so hard to protect.

To illustrate, let's look at a few of the basics and consider what we *should* be doing, and what the government requires us to do.

PROBLEM	WHAT WE SHOULD DO	WHAT OSHA REQUIRES
(1) Caring for the injured	Provide an adequate first aid kit and train <i>all</i> crew members in the basic first aid procedures required to take care of injuries common to our kind of work.	A first aid kit approved by a consulting physician. At least one Red Cross 1st aid card holder in each crew when not in proximity to a hospital, clinic, or infirmary. Red Cross 1st aid training covers <i>all</i> phases of 1st aid, not just those our people would be likely to need.
(2) Temperature extremes.	Require proper clothing for the environment involved; provide proper rest periods and, where feasible, protection from the elements; and salt tablets in hot weather.	Right now, nothing other than the General Duty Clause which requires a safe and healthful place to work, free from recognized hazards. <i>But</i> , a heat stress proposal has been made, and is currently being restudied following a public hearing. The original proposal would, as one concerned person put it, have made it illegal for a Dallas used car salesman to work on his lot in the summer! There is now talk that we also need a regulation for cold stress!

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| (3) Excessive noise | Maintain noisy machines in best condition possible to insure lowest noise level; run machines no faster than <i>required</i> to achieve effective results; let men trade off on work involving noisy equipment. Provide hearing protection where necessary. | Control noise and noise exposure <i>first</i> by engineering <i>or</i> administrative controls where feasible. If not feasible, then hearing protective equipment.
A new noise proposal is now being restudied after public hearings. It looks like the final version <i>will require</i> audiometric testing, written notification of workers exposed, constant monitoring of noise levels, voluminous record keeping — and more. |
| (4) Gasoline | Train men in the hazards of gasoline and how to safely handle it; require approved containers. | In addition to recognized precautions to be observed in handling gasoline, OSHA says it must be dispensed from <i>safety cans</i> only. |
| (5) Eye injury | Train workers to be alert to the hazards involved, and require the use of eye protection where necessary. | The Telecommunications Standard now requires the use of safety goggles for "brush cutting and tree pruning". While this applies specifically to the Telecommunications industry, it is reasonable to expect a compliance officer to use it under the General Duty Clause to apply to all industry. |
| (6) Chain saw cuts involving the leg | Maintain chain saws in proper condition and train and supervise the operator in accordance with recognized, safe work procedures. | OSHA requires recognized specific procedures to be followed by chain saw users, but recently attempted to require the use of ballistic nylon leggings for chain saw operators, by citation under Section 1910.32(a) "Personal Protective Equipment", General Requirements (Fig. 1).
That citation was made against my company, but with the help of several other agencies and organizations, including ISTC, we were able to successfully contest it. |
| (7) Equipment Failure | Proper maintenance of equipment, proper inspection of equipment including written reports of inspection, and proper training and supervision in the use of the equipment. | OSHA requires nothing more. |

(8) Fatalities, generally

Most fatalities in our business involve electrocution, falls from trees, or falling trees. The means of prevention are *basic* and involve only a handful of safety rules and/or safe operating procedures. They are too numerous to list here, but they are clearly laid out in my company's Foreman's Manual as well as manuals of many other companies and associations.

OSHA requires nothing more.

(9) Contaminated drinking water supply

Provide, and keep clean, an approved water dispenser.

OSHA specifically requires the employer to *prohibit* the use of a communal drinking cup, in addition to clean water held in a clean container, etc.



Figure 1. The nylon ballistic leggings earlier required for chain saw operators by EPA. Ruling since rescinded. Front (left) and back (right).

Admittedly, following the subject of fatalities with the item prohibiting the use of the communal drinking cup may seem facetious, it is not intended to be. *It is intended to show that in many areas, especially those involving serious hazards with possibly serious consequences, OSHA imposes no hardship on us. In fact, it very properly requires, under penalty of the law, that we do what we all should have been doing all along. It tends to take safety out of the "necessary evil" category, which is what some, unfortunately, con-*

sider it to be, and give it primary, front line importance. On the other hand, many of the regulations seem arbitrary, and frivolous, serving no useful purpose, while they compound the problem of running an effective safety effort and add to the cost of doing business.

It's proper to conclude that to exercise our moral obligation to our employees and to each other, we must conduct our operations according to recognized safety procedures and OSHA regulations, just the way we all say we do. And, to protect ourselves from frivolous, shotgun regulations that ignore reality and the law of diminishing returns, we must get involved. We must know what our government is doing. We must know what OSHA is proposing that will further regulate our private enterprise. We must make our thoughts known to them. We must do it directly, or through our associations. If we don't, they'll think we don't care, and then they'll *have* to listen to those who want to regulate *everything*, according to their own somewhat educated, always opinionated, views of the world as they see it through their gun barrel vision.

Isn't it better to avoid the need for government control by fulfilling our obligations in the first place? Short of that, isn't it better to have a voice in the regulations that control us? Of course, it is.

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