

DuPage County Environmental, Safety, Health & Property Loss Control Program
Tree Trimming Drop Zone Safety

Purpose: To learn from actual incidents on what can be done to prevent future incidents

Case report: #12-NJ-019*

Issued by: New Jersey Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation Program

Date of incident: Summer 2012

A 27-year-old worker at a tree care company was struck and killed by a 38-pound tree branch.

On the day of the incident, the victim and two other workers were felling a large ash tree. One worker was cutting branches from about 60 feet up, and the other two workers were on the ground processing felled branches using chain saws and a wood chipper.

The worker in the tree signaled that a branch was about to fall via a free-fall cut, not a controlled descent. Both ground crew workers acknowledged the signal.

For an unknown reason, one of the workers began walking toward the drop zone and was struck by the falling branch. He died from his injuries.

Factors contributing to the worker's death were determined to include delineation of drop zone, noise from the wood chipper and miscommunication.

To prevent future occurrences:

1. Clearly mark drop zone areas with tape or spray paint.
2. Ensure workers communicate properly when in or around the drop zone.
3. Keep felled branches that need processing out of the drop zone whenever possible./