

BUSH BULLETIN

Fatal accidents in logging, forestry and tree work

Nine people lost their lives in forest operations and tree accidents during the year to 30 June 1994.

Here's what happened

Logging

- A eucalypt tree being felled did not fall in the intended direction and brushed against an adjacent tree, breaking a branch off the falling tree. The branch fell into the work area inflicting fatal injuries to the feller.
- During a felling operation, a worker was busy sharpening his saw. He suffered fatal injuries when struck by a dead and decaying section of tree. The tree section had previously been leaning against branches of two trees. The tree with the largest branch had been felled and with less support, the dead spar fell into the area where the feller was maintaining his saw.
- A feller was completing felling a tree. As it fell, the tree hit the head of a previously felled tree causing it to kick up from behind a stump where it was lodged, slide down another felled tree and hit the feller, who was positioned downhill, from behind.
- In a clear felling operation, a dozer rolled down a steep bank. No seat-belt was fitted and the operator suffered fatal injuries as he was thrown around inside the protective canopy. The canopy was still complete after the accident.

Land preparation

- A self-employed contractor was constructing a service track in a burnt area being prepared for planting. While turning to an uphill position, the dozer's brakes failed. This was later attributed to a worn cotter pin allowing

a clevis pin to drop out and inactivate the brake-applying plate. The machine gathered speed backwards on the 40 degree slope and after 80 metres came to a sudden halt as the rippers hit rock. The operator suffered fatal injuries after being ejected through the rear safety-glass window at impact.

Commercial firewood

- A part-time commercial firewood operator was felling a macrocarpa shelter-belt on a flat paddock. He had cut rings off most of a tree and was working on the lower part which had large branches keeping it balanced and in place. As he moved alongside the tree, it rolled and he was pinned by one of the branches.

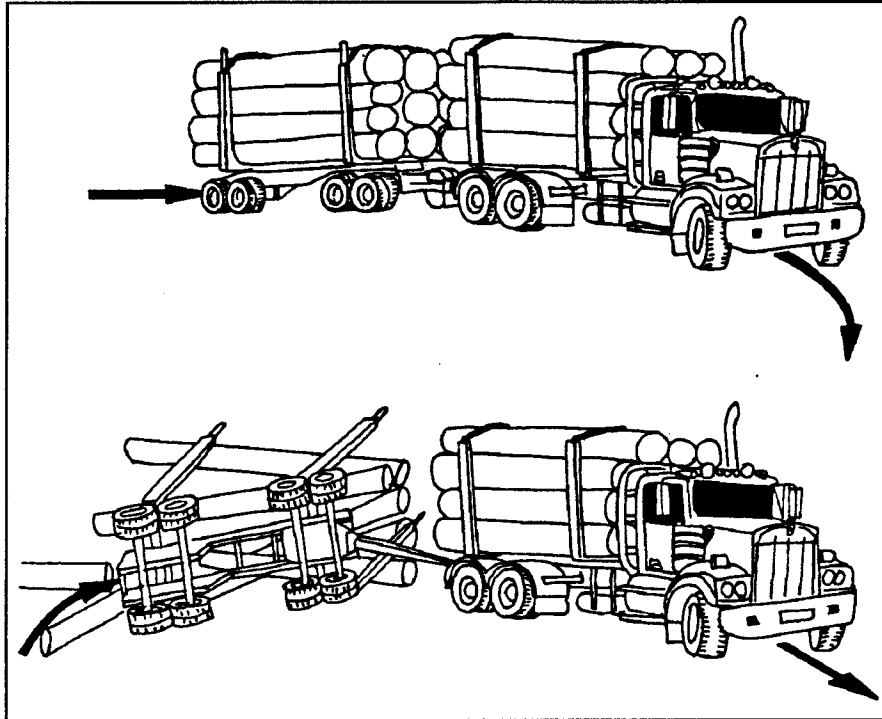
Firewood gathering

- An elderly retired farmer was thrown out of and crushed by a rolling tractor while getting firewood. The tractor had no safety frame or canopy.

Charity or club work involving trees

- An agriculture contractor was felling macrocarpa trees for sawing into timber for a local club to which he belonged. As a tree was felled it brushed another tree and broke off a branch which hit the contractor. The injuries received led to his death in hospital a month later.
- Three large pine trees had been felled at a private residence by a contractor. The tree owner donated the trees to a local service club who decided to cut up the trees for firewood. A club member and his son were cutting off the branches to make the trees ready for cutting up. The tree rolled and pinned the father, after he had cut off a large branch which had been holding the tree in position.

Logging truck trailer tips at low speed



A logging trailer tipped as the truck and trailer made a right angle turn at a main highway junction.

What happened (Information supplied by New Zealand Police)

A truck and trailer unit both carrying pulpwood, were turning at right angles around a traffic island from one state highway onto another. The intersection was clear of traffic and the driver was able to make the turn at what appeared to be a safe speed. However, the trailer started to tip part way around the island and eventually tipped and spilled its load onto the grass verge.

Accident cause

An examination showed tyre marks from almost the start of the turn and then gouge marks at about the apex of the turn suggesting that a front left tyre on the trailer was either flat, or certainly deflated, causing the tyre marks and the gouging of the road surface, and contributing to the trailer tipping over.

Another contributing factor is thought to be the incorrect loading of the trailer which had longer, heavier logs on the top of the load causing a top-heavy load situation.

The corner is also known for the camber which falls away from the road centre to the outside causing balance of the load and vehicle to be thrown to the outside of the turn.

In summary, the accident was caused by a combination of the following:

- Trailer tyre deflation.
- Incorrect loading.
- Poor road shape.

Prevention.

1. Check and ensure that all tyres are correctly inflated and meet road transport standards.
2. When loading pulpwood, be careful to properly balance loads by, if possible, loading longer larger logs on the bottom of the load.
3. Be aware of incorrect, unusual or poor road shaping on your regular cartage routes and watch carefully for them if on a new route.