

Poor Tree Assessment Costs a Life

A farmer was fatally injured when he walked forward of his scarfed and back-cut tree.

What happened

A farmer was felling 4 macrocarpa trees for firewood on his property. He was using a 70cc chainsaw with 68 cm cutter bar to fell the trees. He had been felling the day before and had successfully felled three trees of smaller diameter.

The final tree left standing in the paddock had a diameter of 1.8 metres.

The tree had a heavy lean downhill and towards a gully, however the farmer intended to fell the tree uphill.

The initial attempt to fell the tree uphill did not work. Due to the large diameter of the tree the farmer had to cut block sections out of the back of the tree in order to complete the backcut. The farmer did not have any felling aids e.g. felling wedges. The tree weight shifted back towards the backcut so the farmer decided to use the blocked out section of the backcut as a scarf. He then went around to where he had his original scarf and proceeded to place a backcut above it. During this process the chainsaw ran out of fuel.

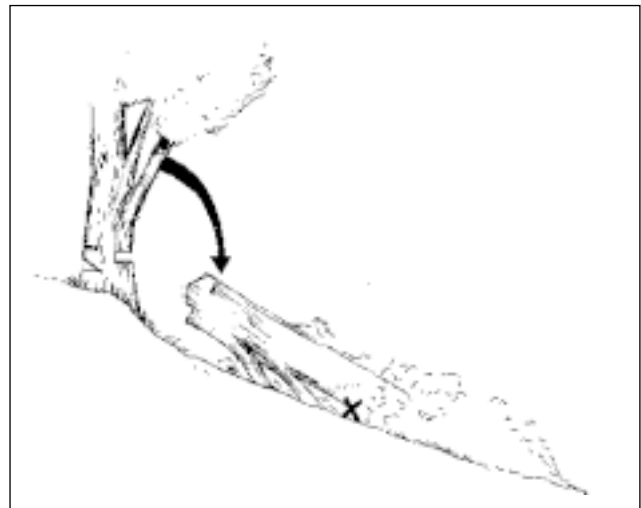
The farmer's fuel containers were located at the bottom of the hill and as he made his way down to them the tree began to fall.

The tree struck the farmer from behind, fatally injuring him.

The farmer had been working alone.

Accident cause

An examination of trees felled previously by the farmer revealed that he did not have a good understanding of basic tree felling principles. The



stump of the tree that killed the farmer showed substandard felling techniques.

The three main causes of this accident were:

- Poor tree assessment;
- Poor felling techniques; and
- Poor escape route.

Prevention

- The felling of any type of tree should be carried out by competent persons. It is the operation in forestry work that causes the greatest number of fatalities.
- The trees being felled in this operation were difficult and dangerous with heavy branches, a wide range of diameters and varying balance and lean.
- A safe escape route is an essential part of the tree felling process.
- When working in dangerous situations such as this, consideration should be given to the use of machinery to assist and make the operation safer.