

Kemp West

Accident

Investigation

August 4, 2014

Investigated and Reported by
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IBEW Local 77 Accident Investigator

Kemp West Accident Investigation for August 4, 2014

On Tuesday, August 4th, 2014, at approximately 11:00 a.m., a 4th step Apprentice Tree Trimmer was seriously injured while trimming a tree.

The crew consisted of a Foreman, a 4th step Apprentice, and two Groundmen. The Line Clearance Tree Trimming crew was working along Sandpoint Way in Seattle, WA, under Seattle City Light (SCL) distribution lines. Their job was to remove trees. Traffic was heavy due to construction nearby and Sandpoint Way was being used as one of the detour routes.

The Foreman parked the lift truck at the edge of the road on the fog line. He then got in the bucket and started booming up. The lower boom was not able to fit under the telephone and cable lines attached to the SCL poles; Thus preventing him from going 'over center' with the boom. By having to extend the upper boom from here, he was able to reach all but two of the lowest branches of the cypress tree. He climbed up the tree cutting off limbs. On the way down he began cutting the wood into chunks filling the chip truck. The Groundman took the truck to empty it while the crew took a break. The truck returned and the crew returned to work. The Foreman said he would get in the bucket and begin trimming the next tree after the crew cleaned up the debris and was through cutting up the wood on the ground. The Foreman directed the Apprentice to cut the last two limbs off the cypress.

The Apprentice began cutting the first limb which was about 4" or 5" in diameter. At this point he was nearly vertical facing the limb; as the limb began to swing down, he back-cut the hinge wood, severing the limb. The Apprentice set the saw on the stump of the branch with both hands still on the saw. When the limb fell it began to slide back. He let go of the saw with his left hand so he could push the limb away from the fence trying to prevent damage to the fence. As he did this his body turned causing him to pull the saw from the stump. He was squeezing his right hand to try and maintain control of the saw which may have caused him to squeeze the throttle. As the saw came down on his outstretched left arm it made multiple cuts on the top of his left hand and forearm.

The Foreman was standing behind the Apprentice, saw him yank his arm back and the saw, still running, hit the ground. He asked the Apprentice if he was okay, he replied "I'm hurt." The Foreman immediately told a Groundman to unhitch the chipper so they could take the Apprentice to the hospital. The Apprentice said call 911. The Apprentice was helped to the side of the lift truck. The Foreman recognized the severity of the Apprentice's wounds and the crew quickly began bandaging the Apprentice's arm and hand.

Seattle Fire Department arrived about six minutes after the call and transported the Apprentice to Harborview Hospital where he underwent surgery that evening and was released the next day. At this time, he is expected to make a full recovery.

Conclusions

1. The Apprentice had completed his cut when he let go the saw. The saw was still running while it was placed on the stump of the limb. WAC 296-45-295 states that the chainsaw shall be held by/ both hands while in use. Adherence to this rule would have prevented this accident.
2. The Apprentice is very near to completing his apprenticeship. The Foreman has almost thirty years in the trade. Both the Apprentice and the Foreman decided the cut was safe , and approached it with a sound plan. While the WAC 296-45-295 forbids cutting directly overhead, it doesn't address cuts made at head height away from the body. While awkward, the cut itself was not the cause of this accident, rather it was the actions taken upon completion of the cut.

Recommendations

A second person, provided there is enough crew on hand, should be used to push or pull limbs with a long stick (the tool commonly carried on these jobs) if there is a possibility of property damage. This procedure would allow the sawyer's hands to remain on the saw, and prevent the second crewman's hands and body from coming in contact with the running saw. This method would not only help protect the customer's property but help prevent the likelihood of an accident. When working alone, all members have to recognize the hazards their activity could present to a customer's property and determine what the best method is for production without compromising his/her safety.