

Worker Struck by Falling Tree Top

Incident Date: July 2, 2020 / Location: Near High Level, AB / Industry: Timber Management



AI Teaching Illustration. Conceptual tree failure and potential fall area before injury. The worker's position and tree geometry are illustrative.

What Happened

A tree planter was planting pine seedlings beside standing trees in a salvage block affected by the previous year's wildfire. A storm brought high winds. The upper half of a roughly 30-metre aspen snapped and fell onto the worker.

Crew members were spread throughout the block, and no one witnessed the incident. Another planter felt the wind, heard several trees fall and went to look for the worker. OHS found significant internal weakness in the older, fire-damaged tree. The falling section caused fatal injuries.

Why This Became Fatal

A weakened standing tree could reach the planting area when it broke. High winds acted on a tree with significant internal defects. Severe weather had been forecast. Written hazard and emergency plans existed, but the worker remained exposed when conditions changed.

NEVER FORGET.

LET THEIR STORY PREVENT RECURRENCE.

What Safe Looks Like

Watch what is above the task, and act before weather changes the risk.



1 Assess Hazard Trees

Use competent assessment; exclude people from trees that could fail.

2 Act on the Weather

Set stop-work triggers and safe retreat routes before the shift.

3 Reach Every Worker

Maintain reliable radios, recall the crew and confirm everyone reaches safety.

AI Teaching Illustration. Crew withdrawn to an assessed refuge beyond tree reach. **LSR link:** Line of Fire.

Investigation Outcome

Blue Collar Silviculture Ltd. faced eight charges laid May 19, 2022. It pleaded not guilty and was **acquitted on all counts on February 21, 2025**. The employer added hazard-tree retraining, radios for every crew member, wind meters and an extreme-weather procedure. The prosecution resulted in no conviction or fine.

Talk It Through with Your Crew

- 1 Could fire-damaged or weakened trees reach our work area or access route?
- 2 What weather change triggers a stop, and who monitors it throughout the shift?
- 3 Can we reach every worker and account for the whole crew during a recall?
- 4 Would you stop or refuse work if a tree or changing weather made it unsafe?

SAFETY COMES FIRST.

Your Right to Refuse – Alberta. You may refuse work you reasonably believe presents an undue hazard: a serious and immediate threat. Promptly report the refusal and reasons to your employer or supervisor. They must investigate. Contact Alberta OHS if unresolved. Take reasonable care not to endanger others. You are protected from reprisal.

Sources: [Alberta OHS investigation OHS-213558](#), pp. 2-8; summary completed October 1, 2025. [Alberta refusal guidance](#). Prepared October 20, 2026. LSR links are learning associations, not findings of a breach.

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