

Safety Bulletin



Serious Near Miss – Fall from height

KEY LEARNING POINTS

A climber fell 7.1m from a 24.4m high Poplar tree and luckily did not receive any injuries. His fall was cushioned by a stack of pruned branches, 0.9m high, he had removed and let drop to the ground.

The climber had used his climbing rope with spilt tail and Blake friction hitch to ascend, securing himself with a stop at each stage when changing anchor points. The ropes were attached to a karabiner that was attached to a swivel connector attached to a bridge set up on his harness.

At 16.6m high he selected a suitable anchor point around the stem and a branch. He used the doubled rope with the split tail and Blake friction knot to descend, attaching himself to the tree with a stop and grillion at each work station before any pruning. He moved between the tree forks at times to prune the branches on that side of the tree. When he finished the pruning, he saw some hung up branches on the understory shrubs about 7.1m from the ground.

He moved towards these, still attached to the rope system, put a foot on the stem for support and bent over and down to grab the end of the branch. He fell at that point onto the pile of branches on the ground. The response from the team was immediate as they were close by. The climber was shocked but unhurt. He did not know why or how he had fallen. All of his climbing rope was lying on the branches he was sat on, including the undamaged eye end of the rope. The other attachments were in place on the karabiner.

The climber stated that he had checked the security of the rope attachments when he started his descent. If the climbing rope had been incorrectly connected, he had not seen this during movement on the tree, or, when attaching and removing the stop at each work station.

The investigation has identified a number causes- key ones are:

- the swivel could move on the karabiner and was able to lift and twist the barrel when at an angle.
- the climber has not set up a secondary anchor point before he started to complete the work activity

Always:

- complete compatibility checks with all climbing equipment used
- have two anchor points when working in the tree at all times unless it creates unacceptable risk or is not practicable
- follow the guidance in 'Good climbing practice' and advice given by the HSE on two rope access and anchor systems

