

HSE – Fall from Height Incidents



This document contains brief examples of the falls from height reported to HSE under RIDDOR.

All injured persons were arborists.

Falls involving a single rope

These incidents were identified using the methodology based on search terms (described in AFAG Paper 33/02):

www.hse.gov.uk/aboutus/meetings/iacs/aiac/afag/071118/afag3302-forestry-arboriculture-riddor.pdf

Please note the limitations on identifying arboricultural incidents reported via the RIDDOR notification system, as outlined in AFAG Paper 33/02. A further caveat to these examples include the limited search terms used.

All climbers had one point of attachment to their tree when the fall occurred.

Incident	Consequences	AAAC
2017-18		
Cut climbing rope with chainsaw whilst removing dead branches and old stubs.	Fatal injuries	N
Failed to complete the engagement on to the D ring when moving around the canopy.	Fractured ribs and head injury	N
Removing deadwood when the branch the climber was standing on failed. Upon weight transfer to higher anchor point (rope), this branch also failed.	Fractured vertebrae	Y
Cut climbing rope with chainsaw whilst removing main stem.	Fractured lower limb	N
Having removed lanyard to reach a hanger, bowline knot on climbing line came undone.	Several fractures	N
Rope slipped through mechanical friction hitch.	Fractured ribs	N
Transferred from one work position system to another with an inadequate knot.	Fractured lower limb	Y
Stem used as anchor for short rope and foot support collapsed during hedge cutting.	Fractured vertebrae	N
During descent prussik loop slipped off the end of the rope as no stopper knot had been tied.	Fractured lower limb	Y
Removed lanyard to move up the tree and friction knot did not grip the rope.	Fractured vertebrae	Y
As the secondary line was thrown around the trunk, primary line flicked over the top anchor point.	Fractured upper limb	N
Transitioned from ladder when limb used for rope anchor failed.	Specified Injury	N
Changing position and single anchor slipped off stub.	Fractured vertebrae	Y
Fell while moving position.	Broken vertebrae	N
2016-17		
Ran out of climbing line.	Loss of consciousness	N
Limb used as anchor for climbing line failed during descent.	Fractured vertebrae	N
Limb failure.	Fractured lower limb	N
Fall during descent on main line. Unclear whether limb failure, equipment failure or error with knot.	Fractured vertebra	Y
Branch dislodged rope from hook attached to crane lowering climber.	Fractured vertebra	N
Accessed tree with ladder, attached lanyard, limb failed before main climbing line in place.	Fracture lower limb	Y
Stood on branch which failed as did branch providing anchor for climbing line.	Fractured ribs	Y
Fell due to issue with mechanical friction device; unclear if item failed or used incorrectly.	Fractured lower limb	Y
Disconnected lanyard while spiking having placed climbing line around main stem of adjacent tree. Unclear why climbing line did not prevent fall.	Fractured lower limb	Y

Falls involving two ropes

Two incidents were identified using the methodology referred to above, where the climbers had two points of attachment when their falls occurred. No incidents of this type were identified for 2016-17.

Incident	Consequences	AAAC
2017-18		
High anchor point connected to rope failed at a fork located lower than where the main anchor point and lanyard were attached.	Injury prevented working for more than 7 days	Y
Tied into two dead branches that both failed.	Multiple fractures	Y

Other types of falls

Contains the remaining fall from height incidents for 2017-18, referred to in AFAG Paper 33/02. One example involved climbing with rope and harness, but it was not established how many points of attachment were used when the fall occurred. The other incidents did not involve ropes.

Incident	Consequences
2017-18	
Jumped from rear of van.	Injury preventing working for more than 7 days
Front part of ladder used for pruning sank into the ground causing the ladder to topple.	Lower limb fracture
Slipped while standing on top of a bank and passing tools over a hedgerow. Should have been reported as a Slip, trip, fall same level.	Injury preventing working for more than 7 days
Overreaching on ladder while cutting hedge. Ladder fell despite being held by colleague.	Fractured vertebrae
Ladder fell during hedge cutting when ground gave way due to undermining by rabbits.	Injury preventing working for more than 7 days
Arborist accessed tree using rope and harness but details of incident including climbing technique and equipment being used at moment of fall not identified. Injured person had no recollection of incident.	Multiple fractures including skull and vertebrae
A dead tree began to uproot when a climber reached the top of a ladder placed against it. As the ladder angle changed the climber descended before jumping halfway down.	Fractured lower limb