Safety Bulletin

HSE Tree cutting prosecution in Essex

A tree surgeon from Essex has recently been fined after falling 4 metres, still clutching a running chainsaw, and landing on a colleague whilst pruning a garden tree.

The employer escaped the fall with minor injuries, but his co-worker sustained a severe head laceration, dislocated shoulder, punctured lung and other internal injuries. The man was initially admitted to hospital for four days, but upon discharge suffered further complications after collapsing again at home. This resulted in a further eight weeks in intensive care. He subsequently has little use in either of his arms due to nerve damage and requires constant care.

The tree surgeon, who had 30 years experience, was prosecuted after an investigation identified he had failed to ensure work was carried out safely. Having been employed to fell a tree in a domestic garden three casual employees were engaged to assist. A three stage ladder was erected after lower branches were removed. This was not long enough, so to increase its height the ladder was placed in the back of the pick-up truck parked at the foot of the tree. The tree surgeon climbed between 4 and 5 metres up the ladder and attempted to remove the top third of the tree using a heavy rear-handled chainsaw. As he made the cut the section swung around knocking him off the ladder. He fell, with the chainsaw, onto his colleague.

The HSE investigation found no PPE was being worn by any of the men, no ropes or harnesses were being used, and none of the men had and form of certification of competence, even in the most basic of chainsaw skills.

The tree surgeon was fined £10,000 after pleading guilty to breaches of the Work at Height Regulations 2005 and Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998.

The incident highlights the importance of only using fully trained and competent tree cutting staff and complying with all relevant legislation, procedures and safe working practices.

Issue date	17th June 2015	Ref. No	UAG019