

N E W S R E L E A S E

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Cal/OSHA Cites Tree Trimming Company after Brush Chipper Fatality

American Canyon—Cal/OSHA has cited Gorilla Tree Service for serious and accident-related workplace safety violations following an investigation of a brush chipper accident that killed a 24-year-old worker in Napa.

On August 15, 2017, the employee was working on the ground as part of a two-person crew removing limbs from a liquidambar tree when a rope used to lower limbs from an aerial bucket was caught and pulled into the chipper, strangling him.

Cal/OSHA’s investigation found that Gorilla Tree Service was unable to certify it had properly trained the worker, who had been employed at the company for about six months.

“Tree work is a high-risk industry, and safety requirements are in place to protect workers from known hazards,” said Cal/OSHA Chief Juliann Sum. “Employers must ensure that workers are effectively trained to use brush chippers and other dangerous machinery safely.”

Cal/OSHA cited Gorilla Tree Service \$23,200 for seven violations including one serious accident-related, one serious and five general violations for the employer’s failure to:

- Provide documented training records for workers to certify that they had completed the required tree work and CPR training.
- Brief workers before starting the job, including a description of hazards, work procedures and appropriate protective equipment.
- Ensure the chipper was equipped, maintained and operated in accordance with the manufacturer’s recommendations. Cal/OSHA found the chipper’s moving parts of belt and pulley drives were not guarded as required.
- Prevent entanglement hazards and unwanted material from entering the point of operation on the chipper.

Tree workers are 56 times more likely to suffer a fatal occupational injury than workers in all industries combined. The major causes of tree worker injuries and fatalities include falls, electrical shock, being struck by a tree branch, chainsaw lacerations, palm tree skirt collapses and ladder accidents.

Over the past six years, brush chipper-related incidents in California resulted in one fatality and four serious injuries:

- A worker was killed in 2012 while feeding brush into a chipper in Nevada City when a rope binding the brush became entangled in the chipper drum and looped around the worker's neck. The force on the rope was so great that the worker was decapitated.
- In Los Angeles County in 2012, a worker was hospitalized from injuries caused by a chipper. Two workers were removing a tree using rope and a brush chipper. One of the workers was attached to a rope that abruptly went into the chipper pulling him toward the feeder. He was taken to the hospital with a punctured lung and fractures to his ribs, left arm, thumb and wrist.
- In 2013, a Solano County worker lost his left ring finger when his wedding band suddenly became caught between the side frame of the feeding bay and the branch he was pushing into the brush chipper.
- While operating a brush chipper in 2013, a worker in Concord was hospitalized. A truck rolled down a hill and jackknifed toward him while he was feeding brush into the chipper. Both of his legs became pinned between the truck's side door and the frame of the chipper's in-feed table. Both of his legs were fractured.

Cal/OSHA launched a [tree work safety campaign](#) in 2016 to help employees and employers prevent accidents, and made available a [Tree Work Safety webpage](#), [Tree Work Safety Guide](#), [fact sheet](#) and [checklist](#).

The California Division of Occupational Safety and Health, or Cal/OSHA, is the division within the Department of Industrial Relations (DIR) that helps protect California's workers from health and safety hazards on the job in almost every workplace.

[Cal/OSHA's Consultation Services Branch](#) provides free and voluntary assistance to employers to improve their safety and health programs. Employers should call (800) 963-9424 for assistance from Cal/OSHA Consultation Services.

Employees with work-related questions or complaints may contact DIR's Call Center in English or Spanish at 844-LABOR-DIR (844-522-6734).

Members of the press may contact Peter Melton or Jeanne-Mairie Duval at (510) 286-1161, and are encouraged to subscribe to get email alerts on DIR's press releases or other departmental updates.

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