Skidder operator fatally struck by tree

Location: British Columbia

Date of Incident: July 2015

Incident Summary: Workers were performing downhill cable logging (grapple yarding) at a forestry operation. A yarder was landing timber onto the single-width road, and a loader was forwarding the timber to a skidder that was just outside the cutblock boundary.

The skidder operator was beside the skidder with the slope above him. A small, non-merchantable tree slid downslope, treetop first. The yarder operator and then the loader operator sounded audible signals to alert all workers of the potential hazard.

The skidder operator, with his back to the slope and the runaway tree, began to move farther away. The tree continued downslope, went outside the cutblock boundary, and fatally struck the skidder operator.

WorkSafeBC Investigation Conclusions:

Cause: Tree struck worker after being disturbed by yarding activity. A small, non-merchantable tree was disturbed by yarding activity and slid downslope outside the cutblock boundary toward the worker, who was standing on the road outside the skidder. The tree struck the worker, and he died from his injuries.

Contributing Factors:

- Hazards not adequately identified. The holder of the forest licence, in the harvest plan, identified steep slopes and the potential for rolling boulders to move downslope toward workers. A safety meeting was not conducted when the workers moved to the new workplace, where the incident occurred. Workplace inspections would have identified additional evidence of uncontrolled hazards that could move downslope as well as hazards that had moved downslope — other non-merchantable trees that had slid toward the same...
area as the incident location. Workplace inspections were inadequate, and unsafe working conditions occurred.

- **Inadequate work procedures.** Work procedures in place at the time of the incident positioned the yarder, loader, and skidder operators in a hazardous location. While yarding downhill, the yarder disturbed timber and debris on the slope. Even though rocks and debris had previously come downslope uncontrolled, work procedures were not changed to mitigate the hazards.

For more information, contact WorkSafeBC to request the full report: https://www.worksafebc.com/en/health-safety/create-manage/incident-investigations/worksafebc-investigations/incident-investigation-reports