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SAFETY ALERT

08-S-12

MECHANICAL HARVESTER TANGLES WITH POWER LINE

August 2008

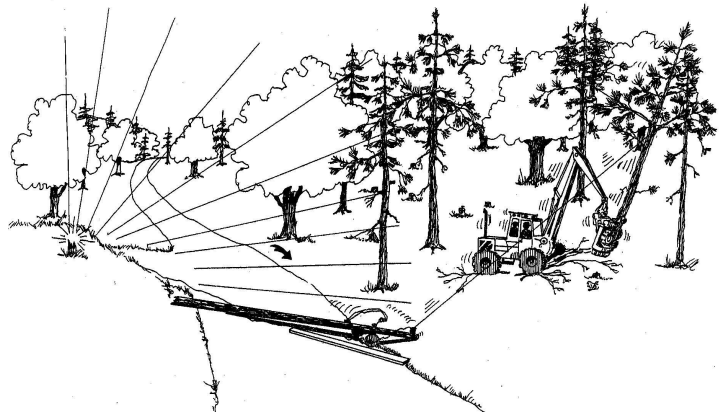
www.forestresources.org/members/serpub/08-s-12.html

BACKGROUND: On an overcast winter day in the Appalachians, a mechanical harvester was completing a harvesting operation by cutting a strip of trees between a power line and a county road.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS: The 26-year-old harvester operator had been involved in his family logging operation since graduating from high school. He had operated the harvester for three years and was considered very experienced.

UNSAFE ACTS AND CONDITIONS: When the operator originally started the harvest, he noticed there was another feed line running perpendicular to the main power line and crossing the road to a private residence. He decided to wait until the end of the harvest before dealing with this risky situation.

A company forester had come to the logger's job that morning and was riding in the machine with the operator when he began cutting this last strip of trees on the job. Although they both mentioned the power line, the operator forgot about the line that crossed through the trees to the house across the road. When the operator approached the line crossing through the trees, he reached out and grabbed a tree that was tangled up with the high voltage wire.



ACCIDENT: As the operator pulled the tree, the forester and operator could see the power line and pole begin to shake violently. Before the operator could react, the pole snapped off, falling across the county road and blocking it.

INJURY: The operator released the tree and backed the machine away from the power line. Both men exited the machine and stood out on the county road to prevent any vehicles from running over the utility pole. They called the power company and reported the incident to the local sheriff as well. Within one hour a power line crew responded, and they tripped a breaker on the nearby pole to cut off the power. No one was injured, and the line was repaired and the power restored within four hours.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CORRECTION: When a machine operator identifies a hazard, it's best to remove the hazard as soon as possible. If it is not feasible to remove the hazard immediately, then mark the area with flagging to identify the hazard clearly. If unsure of how to remove the hazard, discuss the situation and course of action with an experienced supervisor. Consider working out and even writing down a plan to identify and deal with hazards on a specific tract prior to working in the area.

If it is too dangerous to harvest trees close to a power line, leave them uncut or contact the landowner and the power company to see if the power can be cut off briefly while the trees are removed. For more information, please see FRA's Loss Control Overview LCO-30, on *Power Line Safety*, available for free download at www.loggingsafety.com (or go directly to <http://tinyurl.com/568ocl>).

The forester should not have ridden with the operator, and he may have distracted the operator from focusing on the power line danger. Logging supervisors should enforce a "no riders" policy.

Reviewed by:
Rick Meyer
Appalachian/Southeastern Region Manager

Please follow equipment manufacturers' recommendations for safe operation and maintenance procedures.