Workers Had Nowhere to Go

With 70-foot (21-meter) tall trees being felled on a lot that was only 100 feet (30 meters) square, workers didn’t have a lot of room to get out of the way of falling trees. And one didn’t.

What Happened:

A 20-year-old worker was removing branches and cutting up fallen trees while a tree-cutting machine was operating about 60 feet (18 meters) away. A cut pine tree about 70 feet (21 meters) tall came loose from the machine and struck the worker on the back of his head, killing him.

The machine operator said a wind gust had wrenched the tree from the jaws of the tree-cutter.

Recommendations from the investigation:

- All ground crews should work no closer than two tree lengths of the tallest tree being felled. If that’s not possible, bucking should take place only once tree felling has ceased.
- All machines need to be maintained in serviceable condition. The tree-cutting machine had several defects, such as a wrench being used as a throttle control and a log being used to maintain seat height.
- A job hazard analysis should be undertaken and from that, a safety plan needs to be developed and followed.