Training notes from the woods
& the classroom

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Select Correct Felling Direction

By Lee Schauman

In previous articles, we talked about the boring technique as the safest method of dropping a tree because of control, directional felling ability and quality of the butt log. But no matter what type of felling method we use, we need to select a felling direction that will allow the tree to have a reasonable expectation that it will hit the ground rather than hang up. As soon as a tree is hung up, several additional hazards are instantly created. In addition to that, identifying all of the hazards associated with dropping the tree, lean identification, proper escape route, amount of hinge wood, and proper back cut will make felling much safer with much more control.

Additional procedures which will help in reducing or eliminating injuries during the felling procedure are as follows:

1. Always clear away all dead snags or stubs by cutting them down or out of your work area.
2. Always look above you for possible hazards such as loose branches, (widow-makers), possible power lines, or other overhead hazards, and determine the lean of the tree.
3. Plan the direction of the fall of the tree. If it is necessary to fell the tree in a direction other than its' lean, be sure you are skilled enough to do that, or get help so you don't put yourself in a dangerous situation.
4. Clear the area around the tree so you have an unobstructed work area free from trip or other hazards.
5. Prepare an appropriate escape route at a 45 degree angle away from the intended direction of the fall of the tree. Clear away any obstructions which might create a trip or fall hazard, or would prevent a safe escape.
6. Before beginning to cut, be sure no one is within two tree lengths of the tree you are felling.
7. Make a notch in the tree, no matter how small. Failure to do so could allow the tree to splinter, barber chair, and/or go in a direction other than you intend.
8. Give a timely verbal warning understood and heard by all employees/bystanders just before the final felling cut is made.
9. Never cut a standing tree free from the stump regardless of the back cut technique selected. Leave sufficient wood between the back cut and the notch cut, (hinge wood) otherwise loss of control of the tree is not only possible but likely.
10. Never leave a lodged or hung tree, as any disturbance such as vibration of passing equipment, wind, or other weather conditions could cause the tree to dislodge possibly striking another crew member or bystander. Get equipment such as a skidder or processor to help dislodge the tree and get it to the ground safely, or use a suitable alternative technique to get it down. NEVER DROP A SECOND TREE ON TO THE HUNG TREE TO DISLODGE IT, TRY

TO CLIMB UP THE TREE AND JUMP ON IT TO DISLODGE IT, OR CUT THE TREE DOWN THAT THE TREE IS LODGED INTO. All of these techniques are extremely dangerous and unpredictable and can cause serious injury or death.
11. If a lodged tree is to be left for any length of time, appropriate warnings must be put in place to warn others of the danger. Ribboning off or identifying the area with paint markings is the best solution.
12. Never cut on days of high wind or severely adverse weather conditions. Make that decision based on your level of comfort and expertise.
13. Fell the tree in the direction of the lean whenever possible. This makes the job much easier. But if felling it in a direction other than its' lean is necessary, be sure you have the proper tools, skill and expertise to accomplish it, or get help.
14. Always retreat from a falling tree at a 45 degree angle, and get away at least 20 feet, and if available, behind another tree large enough to protect you from branches, projectiles, or from the falling tree itself, should something go terribly wrong.

If we follow these steps, the advantages are enormous. Besides being a much safer process, the other advantages are reduction in:

1. The number of trees falling in the wrong direction
2. Damage to the butt log
3. Time spent pushing and pulling trees down.
4. The number of times a chain saw is pinched in the felling technique.
5. Injuries from pushing and cutting at the same time.
6. The possibility of a tree splitting in a barber chair.
7. The number of trees kicking off the stump.
8. The possibility of trees being completely cut free from the stump, allowing them to free fall.
9. Pulled fibers and side scars.

If these procedures are incorporated into your daily cutting routine, you will become a safer and more efficient chain saw operator.

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