

Dragged to his death

He was a day laborer, from Guatemala, who had only worked for the company for two weeks. He'd been hired through a contract labor company. Although the victim had been in the United States for ten years, he spoke only Spanish. The company owner (the victim's only co-worker on this day) spoke only English.

The day of the accident, the victim was working with his boss trimming trees behind a house.

The boss took the job of climbing into the trees, cutting the limbs and roping them down to the laborer, who would feed them into a brush chipper. The brush chipper was a tow-behind model capable of chipping material up to 12 inches in diameter. It was equipped with a feed-control bar that had three positions: feed, off and reverse. To activate the feed wheel, the operator pulls the bar toward the feed chute. The middle position, neutral, halts the feed wheel, and the operator can push the bar toward the chipper to reverse the wheel and back out material.

The victim had operated the chipper before the day of the accident. And the owner had explained its operation to the victim, although since neither spoke a common language, it's doubtful the victim was thoroughly knowledgeable about the machine.

Approximately 11 a.m. on the day of the accident the owner was in a tree with his saw. When he heard the victim scream, he climbed down and rushed to the chipper, which had now shut down. All that remained of the victim was his hand



Illustration by Don Lomax

extending out of the feed chute.

Although there were no eyewitnesses to the accident, it is likely that the victim's shirt or glove snagged on a branch and he either slipped or stumbled trying to get free and was unable to pull the feed-control bar into the neutral position.

How this accident could have been prevented:

1. Employers should speak enough of the employees' language to be able to clearly convey the scope of work and the hazards involved as well as answer any questions the employees have.
2. Employers should train workers in the safe feeding techniques for brush chippers.
3. When running a brush chipper, employers should provide a watch person to assist the person feeding the material and who can intervene or shut off the machine in case of entanglement.
4. Employers should make sure the area around the feed hopper is free of any tripping hazards.
5. Always feed material into the chipper from the side and im-

mediately move away when the feed wheel engages.

6. Broken or protruding branches that could snag clothing should be trimmed from a limb before it is fed into the chipper.
7. Limbs with protruding branches that can't be easily trimmed, should be positioned on the feed tray so the branches angle backwards, away from the chipper. These swept-back branches are less likely to snag a glove or piece of clothing.
8. When possible, employers should buy or rent the newer models of brush chippers with the most up-to-date safety equipment.

For more information about the safe operation of brush chippers you can order a copy of the Association of Equipment Manufacturer's manual here: <http://shop.aem.org/p-610-brush-chipper-safety-manual.aspx>

For more information about this accident, visit the website: www.cdc.gov/niosh/face/stateface/ny/05ny034.html



Date of safety talk: _____ Leader: _____
 Attending: _____