

Chainsaw Operator suffers broken leg and ankle in winching incident – South West Scotland.

On the afternoon of Monday 1st July in SW Scotland a squad of three were working in a mature oak hardwood selective felling operation on flat terrain in good weather. A large limb had become lodged in a standing mature oak and a County Tractor with a winch was being employed to winch the limb off the tree. The top of the limb was wedged in a fork in the tree at a height of approximately 4 metres, and the bottom of the limb was at ground level. The limb was in excess of 6 metres long and at the minimum end would be some 4 to 6 inches in diameter.

During the winching it would appear that the injured party, who was outside the risk zone when the winching began, entered the risk zone of the operation. The winch operator noticed that the injured party had entered the risk zone at the same time that the limb slid off the branch it was lodged onto and moved sideways and downwards and struck the injured party, who had by then turned to exit the area. The injured party was struck by the oak limb on the legs and knocked over and sustained multiple fractures to the lower left leg and ankle.

The injured party was evacuated by road ambulance to hospital where he subsequently underwent surgery. He will remain in hospital for some time.

The exact circumstances of the incident are still under active investigation.

See the photographs below.

Painted stick marks position of where IP was struck
Oak that limb was lodged in is marked with a red dot.
Limb (opposite) is 4 to 6 inches diameter, fresh oak timber.





This is a complex incident, which could have had a far more serious outcome, but the initial applicable learning points are set out below –

- Job Planning and Risk Assessment must be at a sufficient level of detail that all the anticipated activities are covered and where necessary a method and a prescriptive process for carrying out operations is agreed and recorded. Where situations arise on a worksite either the squad present should be competent to undertake a dynamic risk assessment and create a safe system, or they should communicate to a Manager that a new risk assessment is needed before proceeding to undertake operations.
- Motor-manual and winching operations are inherently hazardous and operators and bystanders need to be competent and be fully aware of FISA Guides 501 (Tractor Work) and FISA 502 (Extraction by Skidder), specifically from 502 point 23 – Safety zone and stopping if breached; training and certification in operation of winches and skidders and tractors requires FMOC training and Certification.
- **Hazard Awareness and Supervision** – All operatives on the worksite must be briefed on the hazards for each particular task and must understand appropriate safe behaviour when certain operations are being undertaken. Adequate supervision must be in place by a suitable responsible person and methods of communication must be understood prior to operations commencing.
- Any changes to the Personnel on a worksite midway through a contract must be accompanied by an induction of the new personnel and this should be evidenced as part of the worksite records.
- Accidents and incidents are by their very nature unpredictable and so the first aid presence, communication and evacuation potential and the need for dynamic management of situations must be adequate and risk assessed for the complexity of the worksite, weather and location and terrain. Managers must continually assess critically if the numbers and competencies of operatives on any particular worksite are adequate, and the risk assessment controls suitable and sufficient.
- AFAG (FISA) Guides have now moved from the HSE website to the FISA website – see www.ukfisa.com and <http://www.ukfisa.com/safety-library.html>

R Shaw, SEQ Director, Scottish Woodlands Ltd 12th July 2013