



THE DANGERS OF DRUG USE AT WORK

When undertaking high-risk operations, for example in the farming and forestry sectors, workers need to be fit, alert and skilled.

A coroner's finding into a forestry fatality a few years ago provided a 'wake-up' call about the use of drugs. The coroner investigated a fatality where a young man died when he was crushed between two felled trees, with his chainsaw found pressed against his throat.

The victim was a breaker-out and tree feller with 10 years experience. On the day in question, he had started work at 7am in the morning and was with his gang for smoko, at about 1:40pm. The man was working alone, out of sight, and when he failed to appear at the end of the day, his crew went looking for him.

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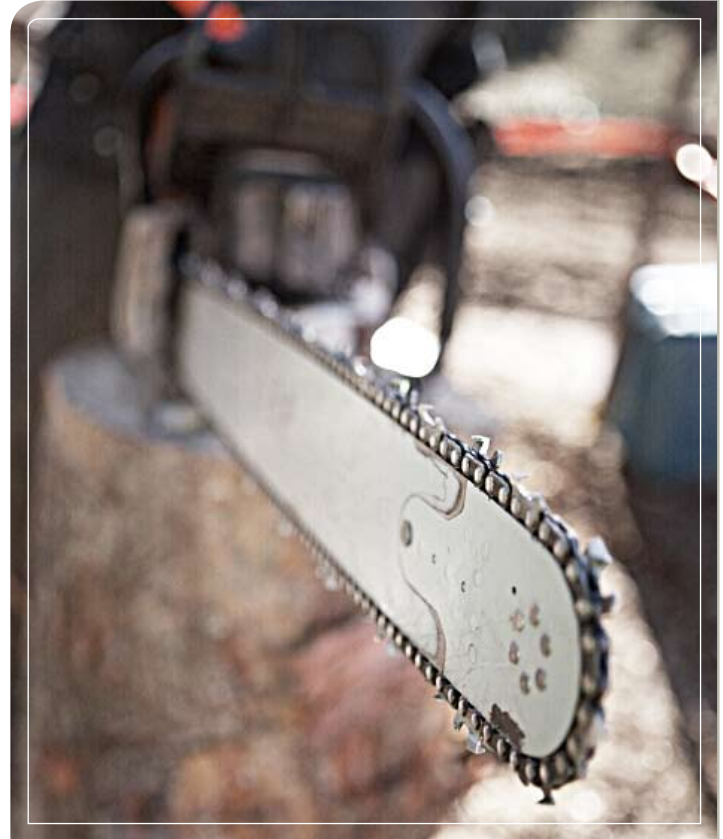
They located his body trapped in an upright position between two fallen stems on a 40-degree slope.

The investigation noted that the felling pattern used was erratic and unsafe, with trees fallen into standing tees and spars not felled. It was a behaviour and work practice the feller's experience and training should have avoided.

Blood samples showed no evidence of alcohol, however 7 micrograms of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) per litre of cardiac blood were found. THC is the active ingredient in cannabis and indicated that the victim must have smoked the equivalent of one cannabis cigarette between half an hour and three and a half hours prior to death.

The drug affects judgement, reaction and co-ordination, and an Institute of Environmental Science & Research report concluded that it was very likely the victim was affected by the drug at the time of his death.

As the investigation progressed, it was learnt that a tree had grazed the back of the victim's neck the day before the fatal incident. He had felled a tree and it had not



fallen as he expected and he'd tried to jump out of the way. The incident had not been reported to the employer or the foreman as an incident or 'near miss'. If it had been reported and discussed, the employer could have ensured that the victim was fit for work the next day.

It is vital that workers report all near misses; it could save someone's life.

This autumn, if a situation looks or feels dodgy then STOP. THINK about your options and DO act in the safest way.



Read more information about forestry safety on the Department's health and safety website by visiting www.osh.dol.govt.nz/order/catalogue/index.shtml#fe

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