



## Arborist injured while working at height

An arborist working recently on an 11kV shutdown became trapped in a tree and suffered a dislocated shoulder when a cut section fell against him rather than in the intended direction. The arborist was unable to free himself and had to be rescued.

The tree was a Common Ash with a single main stem dividing into twin secondary stems two-thirds of the way up. The instruction was to dismantle the tree to ground level, and the arborist was fully qualified and competent. The site was not suitable for a MEWP. The arborist ascended the tree using a rope and harness, but did not use climbing irons as they were not available to him. Once in position, and having removed some small side branches, it was decided to fell one of the two secondary stems. No assisted fell kit was available. Upon completion of the final cut, the stem fell back against the arborist, dislocating his shoulder and trapping him against the other secondary stem. A colleague had to undertake an aerial rescue which involved descending an adjacent tree in which he was working, having a rescue kit prepared by another grounds man, ascending the tree containing the casualty, removing the stem that was trapping the casualty by cutting small sections away and finally making a two man rescue descent.

After the incident the injured arborist stated a gust of wind may have caused the stem to fall back against him as the final cut was being made. An alternative factor may have been that the felling cut was sub-standard due to the inability to achieve a satisfactory work position, which could more likely have been achieved with the use of climbing irons.

### Learning points

1. Cutting teams should always be equipped with appropriate tools. Climbing irons and an assisted felling kit would have eliminated some of the risks introduced.
2. The Site Specific Risk Assessment carried out was not adequate. The wind was gusty, but this was not recorded, and despite the absence of an assisted fell kit and climbing irons the planned work activity continued.
3. Whilst the rescue in practice was relatively quick and effective, this was mainly due to the tree being relatively easy to ascend. Had the circumstances been different the absence of rescue climbing irons could have resulted in a far more serious outcome.
4. If suitable control measures do not reduce documented risks to an acceptable level, then consideration must be given to cancelling a job or task.

Issue date	17 <sup>th</sup> June 2015	Ref. No	UAG018
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