

Tree Work Safety

Tree work includes trimming, pruning, felling, and removal of trees and ornamental palms.

Accidents related to tree work can result in severe traumatic injuries and deaths. Commonly reported accidents include falls, electrocutions, and those caused by falling objects. Most accidents can be prevented by recognizing and controlling hazards in advance as well as training employees on safe work practices and effective use of personal protective equipment.

This fact sheet is a brief overview of tree work safety. For full requirements, workers and employers should refer directly to the **Title 8 standards**.

Cal/OSHA Requirements

Sections on tree work, maintenance, or removal:

- 3420** – Scope and definition
- 3421** – General requirements
- 3422** – Ropes, climbing equipment, tree worker saddles
- 3423** – General electrical hazards
- 3424** – Mobile equipment
- 3425** – Portable power hand tools
- 3426** – Hand tools
- 3427** – Safe work procedures
- 3428** – Stump cutters
- 3458** – Fall protection for date palm operations
- 3458.1** – Ladders attached to date palms

Some other regulations that commonly apply:

- 1598** – Traffic control for public streets
- 1599** – Flaggers
- 2940.2** – Clearances from high-voltage power lines
- 2951** – Line clearance (tree trimming) operations
- 3203** – Injury and illness prevention program
- 3276** – Portable ladders
- 3328** – Machinery and equipment
- 3380** – Personal protective devices
- 3395** – Heat illness prevention
- 3458** – Fall protection for date palm operations
- Article 24** – Elevating work platforms and aerial devices
- Article 105** – Noise exposure

How to Improve Tree Work Safety

To ensure tree worker safety, the employer must:

- Establish, implement, and maintain a comprehensive health and safety program that includes safe work procedures for all tasks performed by workers and written safety rules that are enforced.
- Ensure that qualified tree workers direct tree trimming/removal/repair operations.
- Immediately correct any hazards or improper work practices identified by qualified tree workers.



Qualified Tree Worker

An employee who, through related training and on-the-job experience, has demonstrated familiarity with the techniques and hazards involved in tree maintenance and removal, and use of operation-specific equipment.

- Create a company safety culture that encourages workers to establish safe habits, emphasizing the importance of safety and not taking risks or shortcuts.
- Provide effective safety training to employees so they can perform their work safely and efficiently. Safety training must be:
 - Practical and should include a requirement for employees to demonstrate the ability to safely perform work on their own.
 - Completed prior to a job assignment.
 - Provided in language(s) workers understand.
 - Repeated for certain workers as necessary.
 - Documented to establish proof of training.
- Safety training must cover the following topics at a minimum:
 - The job-specific hazards associated with tree work, including electrical hazards.
 - Identification of common poisonous plants and harmful animals, and preventive measures related to them.
 - Safe work procedures and special techniques for performing tree pruning, trimming, and felling.

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- Fall prevention equipment and practices.
- Methods of communication.
- First aid and CPR.
- Roadway safety.
- Rescue procedures and emergency response.
- Hazards associated with pesticide and fertilizer application, if applicable.
- Proper and safe use and maintenance of:
 - Safety equipment such as harnesses, belts, tree saddles, ropes, and lanyards. Inspect safety equipment before each use and immediately withdraw it from service if found defective or damaged.
 - Personal protective equipment (PPE) such as hard hats, face shields, safety glasses, shoes, gloves, high-visibility clothing, and hearing protection.
 - Equipment and tools such as chippers, pole pruners, trimmers, chain saws, and stump cutters.
- Prior to the start of a job, have a qualified tree worker conduct a job briefing with the crew to communicate and discuss:
 - Specific hazards associated with the job before it starts, or even while working if a new hazard is discovered.
 - The appropriate work procedures to follow, e.g., the safest method to access a tree.
 - Appropriate PPE and any other items needed to accomplish work safely.
- Provide general information on safety to employees including:
 - Being attentive to what other workers are doing, as unexpected actions can create new hazards.
 - How to use high-visibility attire, and the importance of positioning themselves to be easily seen by others.
 - Staying alert to surrounding hazards at all times, especially while working uphill where dangerous materials could fall toward other employees working at lower elevations.
- Conduct an initial job site inspection and perform daily hazard assessments of equipment and safety devices before the start of each workday to identify existing and potential hazards.
- Check for weather updates and storm warnings. Take into account the additional dangers of certain weather conditions and stop work if necessary. Such dangerous conditions include high winds, fog, ice, rain, high heat, thunder, and lightning.
- Protect tree workers from heat-related illness. Ensure there is adequate shade, provide adequate supplies of potable drinking water, and encourage frequent consumption.
- Control pedestrian and vehicular traffic effectively, as needed.
- Establish rescue procedures and provide training in emergency response protocol. Provide training in aerial rescue procedures for employees whose job assignments may require them to perform aerial rescues.
- Ensure at least two people who are trained to administer first aid and CPR are available when field work involving two or more employees is being performed.
- Have workers wear a tree workers' saddle and require at least two means of being secured when they work aloft.
- Make sure that employees are tied in or secured while ascending the tree and remain so until the work is complete and they are back on the ground.
- For work with chippers, take additional precautions:
 - Stand to the side, not directly in front of the opening, and never place any part of the body on the feed table when feeding materials into the chipper.
 - Do not wear loose clothing, safety or climbing gear, or jewelry that can snag and be pulled in.
 - Do not wear ropes and keep ropes away from the feed opening.
 - Ensure all conveyor-fed chippers are equipped with a trip bar or emergency stop located where employees can easily reach it.
- For more on tree work safety, see ANSI Z133 Arboricultural Operations - Safety Requirements.

It is the employer's responsibility to provide proper tools, equipment, PPE, fall protection gear, and other items necessary to perform tree work safely.

Resources

- [Cal/OSHA - Tree Work Safety](#)
- [National Weather Service](#)
- [OSHA – Chipper Machine Safety Card](#)
- [OSHA – Working Safely with Chainsaws](#)
- [Tree Care Industry Association](#)

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This document is available with active links at www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/dosh_publications

For assistance regarding this subject matter, employers may contact

Cal/OSHA Consultation Services at 1-800-963-9424 or InfoCons@dir.ca.gov

www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/consultation.html

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