

# Felling – Still our Number 1 RISK!



**Nationally**, the lost time injury frequency rate has **climbed steadily** since July 2016! Industry data (IRIS) shows the critical risk area with the **highest number of incidents was felling** followed by breaking-out. During the period, nine of the lost time felling injuries were in clearfell operations and the remaining four were in thinning operations. Of the felling injuries, four were the result of debris that either fell from above or that flicked back into the feller. Three injuries resulted from slipping over on the terrain and some involved being hit by the tree being felled or the driving tree.

## PF Olsen Operations – A Similar Trend!

There have been six lost time injuries and two medical treatment injuries in our operations in the third quarter (Jul – Sep 2018)! Two of these occurred in tree felling – showing similarities to the national report and that **we should be concerned**.

Despite focus, tree felling remains our most serious risk! **What can we do to protect our tree fellers?**



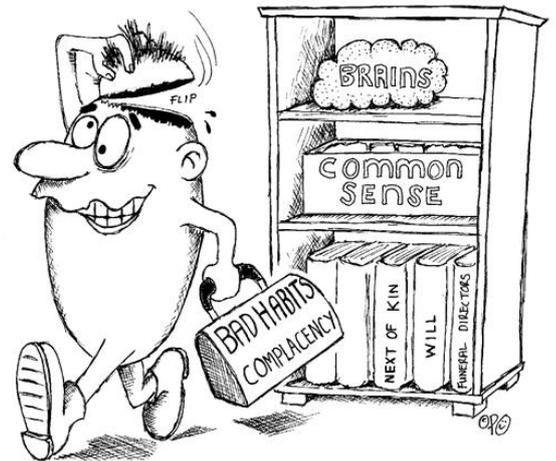
- Plan the ‘current’ work area thoroughly – identify all the hazards and risks.  
Note: WorkSafe NZ report that often tree fellers are **relying on old or generic plans that do not meet the actual needs of the current work environment**.
- “Work on it rather than in it...” in this context it means **proactive supervision** by employers who must **diligently and regularly monitor** the high-risk tasks.

# Felling – No Room for Complacency!

**ACOP Rule 2.5.1** states “...The employer (referring to the principal contractor) shall ensure that a competent person is in charge of each operation, who shall supervise and ensure work is supervised and performed in a safe manner.”

That ‘safe manner’ is the 5-step tree felling plan;

- (1) Site assessment,
- (2) Individual tree assessment,
- (3) Preparation of the work area and escape route,
- (4) Choose and use safe felling techniques, and
- (5) Retreat and observe.



These 5-steps are critical to success; as the following incidents show:



**Noggin #271:** A tree feller was walking to the next tree and his chosen path took him through a small water race (this is an old mining site). As he reached his next tree he tripped on a vine, lost his balance and he fell back into the water race. In the process he sustained a large gash to his upper arm.

**Noggin #298:** A tree feller, having felled a tree, was walking along his escape route. A branch came back at him from the area in front, striking him across the neck and chest.

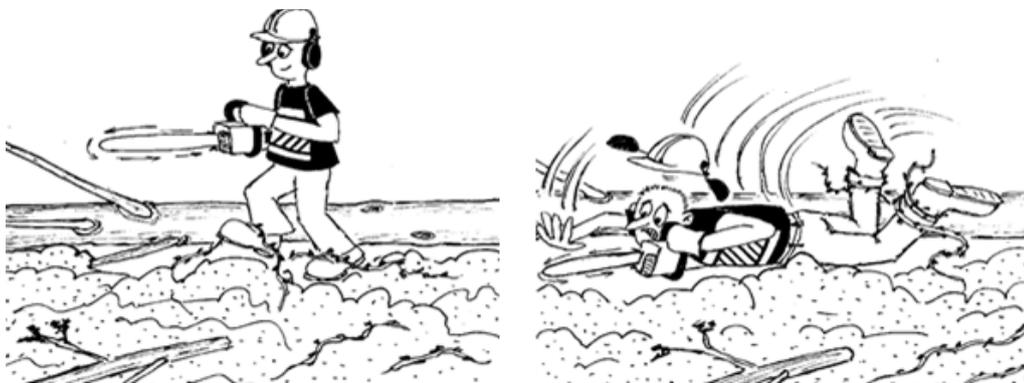
## Tripped up During Step 2/5 – the ‘Individual Tree Assessment’!

- [ ] Look up for dead or broken branches; anything that may dislodge during felling.
- [ ] Look for branches interlocking with branches of other trees.
- [ ] Watch your step – vines, holes, loose and water-logged soils can be treacherous.
- [ ] Look for rot or other disturbance around the base that could affect fall direction.
- [ ] Always follow the relevant ACoP’s and safety rules e.g. Safe Ops and GSR’s.
- [ ] Monitor the wind speed and direction and know when felling should stop.
- [ ] Remember: If you do not think you can fell a tree safely, **leave it** and **get help**.

# Not Over Slips and Trips Just Yet!

## Slips and trips, especially when carrying objects, take a toll...

In one lost time incident, a skidworker slipped over and extended his left hand/arm to break the fall resulting in a damaged ligament in his left hand. In a medical treatment incident, a worker was walking back to his processing machine with a saw chain in his hand when he tripped and cut his hands on the chain. Keeping our work area clean of debris, and walking only on level and solid ground are two helpful tips.



## Planter working on steep slopes takes a tumble...

**Noggin #452 12/10/17:** Planting on steep hillside (averaging 40 degrees) the ground gave out under a planter who slid uncontrollably downhill for 30 meters. During the slide he caught his right arm up in some slash which slowed him down. This contact resulted in a sprained shoulder and some minor grazes and lacerations on his arms, legs and hands. When he eventually came to a halt he was winded and stayed put until help arrived.

## The choices we face, the decisions we must make...

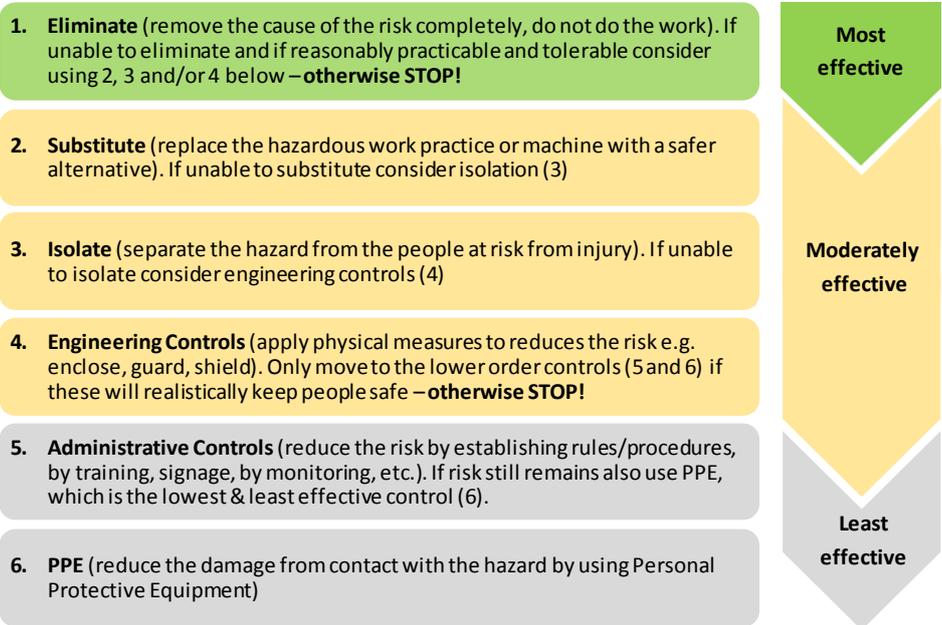
Any work with circumstances like those noted above will have the same level of risk! The chances of an accident are high, and if we continue to apply the same management strategies in these known problem areas, we are showing we are not learning from the past. Applying the same strategies will invariably lead to repeat incidents of harm and/or damage!

When presented with high-risk work, we (everyone involved) must take appropriate steps to manage risk by deciding to eliminate or minimise worker exposure to the underlying hazards. Sometimes elimination will mean not completing some part or all of the work. If we do choose to do the work and adopt minimisation, then the controls we put in place need to be realistic and substantially reduce the risk!

# A new [Risk Management Approach](#)<sup>1</sup>



Start at  
the top,  
not at  
the  
bottom



The initial response to the planting incident (on p. 3) was to say, “...we told the Contractor where not to work and to stay off slips and the really steep stuff.” And the follow up action was to “...ensure spiked boots are in good condition, worn and replaced as necessary.”

These controls fit into the areas ‘5’ and ‘6’ in the risk management approach outlined above. While ‘okay’ in themselves they were not substantial enough as the circumstances proved. The lesson here in relation to critical risk is to **start with elimination** i.e. asking if we must do the work or if there are parts of it that we can leave. If we are staying away from parts, use a robust form of isolation to keep people away from the hazardous pieces we have identified!

In some cases, substitution may be considered e.g. rather than planting top down through steep areas could we plant the lower reaches by forming and using a new access. Also, could we use a helicopter to drop in trees and equipment while the crew walks into the area. This may require some additional emergency protections and a day rate rather than per tree rate.

Finally, while engineering controls can be difficult to establish in some forest operations we are not without opportunities. We encourage everyone to suggest any physical measures that could add a layer of protection to the work. Remember – we are required to **manage the risk!**

<sup>1</sup> The heading at the top of this page contains a blue underlined hyperlink. This link leads to the publication “Identifying, assessing and managing work risks” – July 2017.” This WorkSafe NZ guide covers aspects of managing work risks.