

SAFETREE SAFETY ALERT

UNSAFE TREE DRIVING PRACTICES SHARED OVER SOCIAL MEDIA

November 2022

The risk

Recently videos of dangerous tree driving practices have been shared over social media. These unsafe practices put those in the videos at risk of harm. The videos also spread mis-information about how to tree drive, which puts others at harm if they copy these unsafe practices.

Minimising the risk

- Information on the safe way to tree drive is in the Treefelling Best Practice Guide.
- Information from the guide is summarised in this Alert or see <https://safetree.nz/resources/tree-felling-bpg/>
- There is also a video on tree driving on the Safetree website. <https://safetree.nz/resources/how-to-tree-drive/>
- Share this Alert with crews at tailgates. Make sure crews understand the safe way to do this hazardous job.
- Talk to crews about use of phones and social media at work. It's great that people want to share videos of their work. But videos showing dangerous work practices can spark copy-cat trends and put others at risk. They can also prompt a response from the Forest owner/manager or WorkSafe.

TREE DRIVING

Tree driving is the process of knocking a tree, (or trees) to the ground, by felling another tree on to them. It can also be used to knock a hazard out of a standing tree by brushing past the hazard and dislodging it. Driving is considered one of the most hazardous practices used in manual tree felling and has been identified as a primary factor in tree felling fatalities.

There are two types of tree drive: planned and unplanned.

A planned drive is where a target tree, or a hazard is identified as unsafe and a decision is made to use a drive. This happens in advance, before any cuts are made in any trees. Planned drives can be used as a tool to help remove a hazard from the felling area, or to maintain the desired felling pattern by deliberately pushing a backward leaning tree over with one that is leaning in the right direction. Planned drives can sometimes involve more than one tree, but Rule 11.7.2 in the Approved Code of Practice for Forest Operations states that tree driving must not exceed one onto two trees.

An unplanned drive is where the tree to be felled has either lodged in another standing tree, or it has sat back as the cuts were being put in (and because of this the tree is leaning back, away from the intended direction of fall). When one tree is hung-up in another, the direction of fall has been determined. So using a driver tree to brush past it can often be enough to dislodge it from the standing tree.

The unplanned drive of a cut up tree is hazardous because the direction of fall has not been determined. It could fall in any direction, particularly if the felling cuts have not been put in accurately, or the wind strength or direction has changed. The hazard is even greater if the faller has to spend time clearing around the driver tree and cutting an escape route instead of watching what the cut up tree is doing.

Whether planned or not, driving one tree onto another tree hung-up in a standing tree, could cause the following hazards:

- the butt of the driver tree pivoting upwards and sliding back towards the faller
- the hung-up tree could break and fall back towards the faller.

The key difference between the two types of drive is that the planned drive can be properly prepared for, whereas options are limited when doing an unplanned drive.

TREE DRIVE PROCEDURE

The procedure to set up a tree drive is:

1. Carefully assess the tree or trees to be driven and check that the driver tree is big enough to do the job and is leaning in the right direction.

2. Call up the contact person and advise them of the intended tree drive, it's good practice to state whether the drive is one onto one or one onto two.

3. If the drive is more than one onto two, call up an observer and wait for their arrival before starting any felling cuts.

4. Clear any undergrowth or slash from around the tree(s) to be driven, in the access routes to all the trees in the drive, around the driver tree and along the escape route. This can be done while waiting for the observer.

5. Re-check the lean and crown distribution of all trees in the drive.

6. Ensure there are no obstacles or other standing trees in the path of the drive.

7. Determine the felling cuts to be used.

8. If there is an observer on site, ensure they are in a safe position where they have an unobstructed view of the tops of the trees, and make sure they have an effective means of communicating with the faller.

9. Insert the felling cuts in the tree(s) to be driven, placing a wedge in each tree as the backcut is being made.

10. Carefully aim the driver tree to fall in a direction that will bring all trees down.

11. If the driver tree is big enough and in the right location, aim to brush it against the top of the tree(s) to be driven.

12. If the driver is smaller than the tree(s) to be driven, or there is doubt that it will have enough momentum to knock the drive down by just brushing it, aim the driver to hit the centre of the tree(s) to be driven.

13. Move clear along the escape route as soon as the driver tree starts to fall, looking up to watch for any falling hazards.

14. In particular, watch out for breaking tops or extra leaders that could snap off and fall back towards the faller as the drive goes down.

If there is any doubt about the proposed drive, the faller must call up for an observer to come and provide a second opinion on how to get the hazard down and to watch out for falling hazards that could be dislodged as the drive proceeds. Observers must have an effective means of communicating with the faller. A two way RT with an earpiece receiver in the earmuffs is recommended.