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Lack of training by company led to logging worker's tragic death

Sawyer Tree Service's failures left workers unaware of operating and machine hazards

WOODLAWN, Ill. – The death of a 20-year-old worker killed when a tree fell on him during logging operations could have been prevented if his employer had removed damaged trees prior to conducting logging operations on a 40-acre site in Woodlawn, federal inspectors determined.

The U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration cited Sawyer Tree Service LLC on Feb. 10, 2016, for four serious safety violations, after it completed its investigation into the Aug. 11, 2015, death. Logging is one of the most dangerous occupations in America, with 77 recorded deaths in the forestry industry in 2014, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports.

"This was a tragic, preventable death of a young man who had been on the job just two months," said Aaron Priddy, OSHA's area director in Fairview Heights. "As loggers use their tools and equipment, they deal with massive weights and the momentum of falling, rolling, and sliding trees and logs. Training workers to recognize hazards is vital to preventing injuries in this dangerous occupation."

The agency found the Robinson-based company, which recently started a logging division, was in the process of removing logs from two tracks of land in Woodlawn. At the time of the fatal incident, a second employee was operating a log skidder and pulling two logs down a path when the logs struck a damaged tree causing it to break off and fall. The falling tree hit the young man, who suffered fatal internal injuries.

In its investigation, OSHA determined Sawyer Tree Service should have removed the damaged tree prior to conducting logging operations. The company also failed to train employees in equipment operation and to recognize logging hazards. The agency also found the company allowed employees, other than the operator, to ride on mobile vehicles without using safety restraints and seat belts. Sawyer also failed to provide first-aid and CPR training to employees.