

Working safely with trees

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Each year workers in the amenity tree industry are killed or seriously injured. It is important to control the risks when doing tree trimming, pruning or removal.

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Preparation and planning

To ensure a working environment that is safe for your workers and contractors, it is important to provide safe systems of work, and to prepare and plan according to each job. To reduce the risks of injury, every tree must be inspected before work begins to determine the safest way to undertake the work.

If your inspection suggests methods such as mechanical access, e.g. truck mounted elevating work platforms (EWP) or cherry picker are not suitable, consider whether the work can be safely undertaken by climbing the tree.

- Ensure a skilled and experienced person carries out a visual assessment of the tree, considering hazards, condition, wind loading, structural integrity and location prior to commencing works.
- Ensure all workers have received information, instruction and training and are deemed by the employer to be able to safely undertake the work.

- Make sure workers are informed and trained in emergency procedures for each work site, as well as in the use of equipment working near overhead powerlines, work tasks and on-site communication.
- Induct all workers onto each job site, explain tasks, clearly allocate roles and discuss hazards.
- Ensure appropriate PPE are worn for the task such as helmets, boots, cut resistant trousers, eye and ear protection, and sun protection.

Working near overhead powerlines

Serious incidents have occurred when workers have been trimming trees near powerlines. Incidents have resulted in:

- serious injury or death
- damage to overhead powerlines
- disruption to electricity supply

Planning

- Before starting tree work near overhead powerlines, hazard identification must be carried out. A risk assessment should also be undertaken to ensure adequate control measures are in place to protect the health and safety of all workers.
- Check that foliage is far enough away from powerlines for safe work to commence.
- Always plan where the arc of the cut branch will fall, or cut branches into smaller sections to maintain clearance from powerlines.

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Trees touching powerlines

- If a tree is touching overhead powerlines, don't touch any part of it even if you are earthed. The entire tree—including branches and leaves—may be energised.
- Talk to the local electricity supply authority and observe their recommendations before starting work near powerlines.
- Never assume a tree branch can safely rest on or against overhead electric lines—they can conduct electricity even in dry conditions.

Training and No Go Zones

- Consult with the asset owners (electricity supply authority) to determine work requirements, permits, and guidelines for the site.
- Induct all workers onto each job site, explain tasks, and discuss hazards and controls.
- Ensure all workers know the [No Go Zone guidelines](#) and risks associated with working near powerlines (consider underground powerlines, if relevant).

[Using powered mobile plant near overhead assets - Guidebook](#)

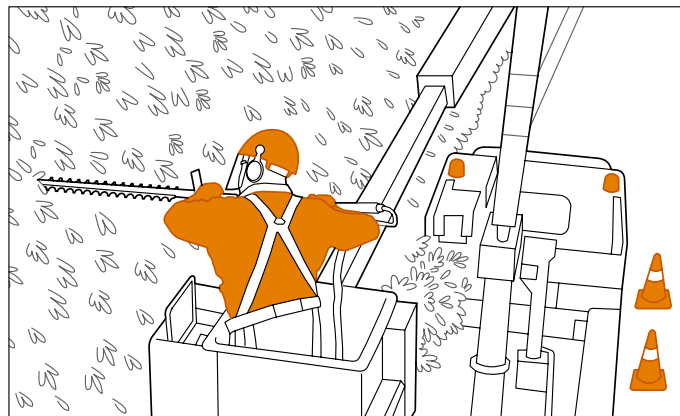
[Energy Safe Victoria – Rules for vegetation management work near overhead powerlines by non-electrical workers](#)

[Energy Safe Victoria – Don't put your life on the line brochure](#)

Working at height

Eliminate the need to climb the tree

- Always consider whether there is a safer method of doing the work without climbing, such as using an EWP.



Training and supervision

- Ensure all climbers are physically fit, competent, and experienced in the work required. Climbers must not be under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- If a trainee is doing the work, they should be supervised at all times.
- Have a secondary climber who is skilled in aerial rescue, in case the primary climber gets into difficulty and can't self-rescue.
- Ensure a designated person is on the ground to monitor climbers (e.g. the person controlling the lowering rope).

Equipment

- Use equipment rated and/or assembled by rated agencies.

Ensure a second set of climbing gear has been checked and is available for rescue purposes.

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Working with chainsaws

A tree climber was seriously injured when the pruning saw he was using kicked back. As the saw was being used singlehanded, it was not possible for the wrist chain brake or the inertial chain brake to activate.

- Always hold the chainsaw with both hands. If the chainsaw kicks back or the branch being cut moves unexpectedly you should have both hands on the chainsaw or risk being seriously injured or even killed.
- Use EWP's and pole saws as appropriate.
- Reposition the climber to remove the need to overreach and do not cut anything above shoulder height with a chainsaw.
- Stabilise your position before cutting.
- Have a second point of attachment (in case you accidentally sever the primary rope).

Falling objects

Each year vegetation workers are killed or seriously injured when hit by falling objects.

Risks increase following severe weather or fire events when a tree's structural integrity can be compromised or fallen branches can be hung up.

A ground worker was struck by a falling tree branch when he entered the drop zone before the all clear was communicated. He sustained head and spinal injuries.

A worker was seriously injured when a branch being lowered from a tree swung out and hit him in the head and shoulder. The lowering rope had been incorrectly positioned causing the weight of the branch to swing out of control.

Drop zone

- Assign a clearly designated drop zone for the lowering or dropping of branches or the tree.
- Check the drop zone to identify hazards. Logs and branches can bounce in unexpected directions for considerable distances.
- Ensure no one enters the drop zone until the climber and person lowering branches and logs indicates all clear.

Communication

- Ensure there is a clear method of communication between the climber and the ground crew. This may include two-way devices, hand signals, whistles, or mobile telephones.

Working with wood chippers

A worker was struck in the head by metal ejected from a wood chipper. The anvil bolts were loose, causing the knives to strike. Fragments of the blade, anvil and chipper fan were ejected from the wood chipper through the inspection hatch.

Maintenance

Chippers should be regularly serviced and maintained according to the manufacturer's instructions. This includes:

- tensioning all bolts and nuts using a calibrated torque wrench
- checking tolerances between the knives and anvil
- maintaining disk/drum bearings.

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Training and supervision

- Ensure all operators have received training and supervision before operating the chipper unsupervised.

Chipper use

- Keep in mind that the disc or drum of a chipper can take several minutes to stop moving.
- Ensure controls are readily accessible so the chipper can be shut down instantly if a problem occurs.
- Ensure the chipper has a working emergency stop button.
- Always feed the chipper from left kerb side.
- Use a wooden push stick when feeding in smaller branches (never hands or feet).
- Provide appropriate PPE to operators.

Emergency procedures

Lack of appropriate emergency procedures increases exposure to health and safety risks. For example:

When a climber is in a tree, there should be a second climber present who is skilled in aerial rescue. The second climber's gear must be readily accessible and include a first aid kit. It is not appropriate to rely on emergency services to conduct an aerial or high angle rescue.

Check emergency preparedness

- Are first aid arrangements in place (trained first aider, first aid kit)?
- Is the aerial rescue procedure known and practiced?
- Are emergency communications and contacts available?
- Is the work location address known to all workers?

More information

Guidance and checklists for the amenity tree and gardening services industry, Worksafe Victoria 2019.

Guide to managing risk of tree trimming and removal work, July 2016, Safe Work Australia.

Tree and vegetation management near overhead electric lines, July 2014, Safe Work Australia.