



United States Department of Agriculture
Forest Service



Safety Alert

August 10, 2022

SUBJECT: CHAIN SAW CUTS TO SWAMPERS

AREA OF CONCERN: Chain Saw Operations

DISTRIBUTION: All Agency Chain Saw Operators, Module Leaders, Fire Safety Officers, Forest Safety Managers

DISCUSSION: There has been a marked increase in injuries to swampers involving chain saw strikes and struck-by incidents (i.e., when the swamper is hit by the tree or parts of the tree being felled) this 2022 fire and field season.

During saw operations involving saw teams the sawyer may need to operate the chain saw in close proximity to the swamper. This presents unique safety considerations.

Each year, there are swampers who receive lacerations to their hands, arms, or legs by working too close to a running chain saw. Chain saw cuts are not simple cuts like that made by a knife; they are significant and complex wounds that happen extremely quickly. Chain saws shred flesh and can quickly remove muscles, tendons, and bone.

The sawyer and the swamper have a shared responsibility to each other's safety, as well as that of other firefighters in the area.

MITIGATION MEASURES: To reduce risk of injuries due to chain saw strikes, the sawyer and swamper need to be aware of and avoid the strike zone. The strike zone is a 360-degree radius around a sawyer at a distance equivalent to the sawyer's arm length plus the length of the chain saw and bar. This is a minimum, and may need to be expanded due to other factors such as fatigue, experience, etc.

During tree felling operations, the sawyer is responsible for cutting area control. This means not allowing anyone within a distance of 2 1/2 the height of the tree being felled - including the swamper.

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