



Region Eight Saw Program  
Region Eight Fire Risk Management

## Safety Bulletin



Date: November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2024

R8-FAM-RM-2024-11-1

Subject: Post Storm Saw Operations and Fatigue

**Topic:** Complex saw operations have increased recently in response to historical storms across multiple states. Several saw and felling injuries have occurred due to the amount of operational saw time in storm-damaged areas. It is important for leaders and sawyers to recognize the additional fatigue and operational exposure that occurs with ongoing storms and fire operations.

### Hazards:

- 1- **Cumulative fatigue:** The number of events and long hours of work may lead to cumulative fatigue that increases the risk to sawyers. Many sawyers engaged in Helene Operations returned home from fire assignments as Helene was making landfall. Increased “trigger time” and continued manual work has impacted mental and physical fatigue.
- 2- **Higher risk and complex operations:** Post storm saw operations have a higher complexity and risk than normal operations. Not all sawyers have experience cutting in post storm conditions. Additional overhead hazards, downed electrical lines, contamination, binds and tension exist outside of normal operations.
- 3- **Compound pressures:** Self-imposed pressure to complete an assignment has been a common theme during saw injuries. Many Forest Service employees working in storm damaged areas are personally driven to accomplish the mission, and then return home to complete similar work. External timelines for post-storm work, on top of normal seasonal duties, also drive employees to quickly finish high hazard tasks.

### Mitigations:

- 1- **Properly refuse risk:** Forest Service employees have the right to properly refuse risk if the assignment is too hazardous. Employees need to remain cognizant of fatigue, high complexity, and compound pressures when deciding whether to engage.
- 2- **Completing a thorough risk assessment:** Either a Job Hazard Analysis (JHA) or a Risk Assessment (RA) must be completed before engaging in chainsaw operations. Working with your Safety Manager, a site-specific JHA or RA can help to inform sawyers of the additional hazards that may exist. Completing Tailgate Safety Sessions and using the [USFS Risk Calculator](#) are also useful tools for communicating post storm damage risk.
- 3- **Rest and recovery:** The only effective means to recover from fatigue is to get adequate rest, both physically and mentally. Employees may not recognize the signs of fatigue. Peers and supervisors should therefore be familiar with the [signs of fatigue and stress](#). Leaders should be mindful that employees living and working in disaster recovery areas may need additional time off and rest for recovery.
- 4- **Taking a tactical pause:** After prolonged saw operations, a tactical pause may be a useful tool in communicating the hazards associated with saw operations. Line leadership may use ongoing operations, cumulative fatigue, and the increase in incidents when considering a safety stand down or tactical pause to discuss the concerns.

**Additional Resources:**

[Operation Care and Recovery](#)

[Stress Continuum](#)

[Cherokee NF Tree Felling Injury 2022 RLS](#)

[TFMAS Tree Felling Near Miss 2021 RLS](#)

[Bankhead NF Bucking Accident 2019 RLS](#)

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