



## UI Extension Forestry Information Series

### Weekend Warrior Logging - Are You Being Safe?

Chris Schnepf

One of the satisfactions of owning forest property is working outdoors to improve the health and value of your forest. The more you learn about forestry, the more things you will see in your woods that need work. Many of these forest improvements involve cutting trees.

Some landowners want to do their own logging because they prefer a hands-on approach to culturing their forest. Also, it is increasingly difficult for landowners to find or afford good loggers to do small jobs – especially those with little immediate economic return, such as thinning poor quality trees.

Unfortunately, most people who are not full-time loggers or forestry contractors have had little, if any, training related to logging safety. Falling a tree, bucking it into a log, skidding it to a landing, then loading it onto a truck and hauling it to a mill may look simple and straightforward. Unfortunately, the reality is that logging is one of the most dangerous activities in the world. Life and limb threatening accidents lurk at every corner. In a recent year, the Idaho Industrial Commission recorded approximately 200 insurance claims for logging accidents where the agent was: 1) a log, tree, or part of a tree or, 2) a device used to cut a tree such as a chainsaw or axe. Injuries ranged from physical impairment and loss of work time to death (eight people died in Idaho logging accidents that year). Many of the professional loggers in these accidents had years of experience and attended annual safety and first aid training. Here are a few of the types of questions you should be asking yourself to avoid accidents when cutting or moving trees on your property.

- *Protective Clothing.* Are you wearing the appropriate types of safety clothing for the activity (hard

hat, eye protection, chaps, earplugs, gloves, appropriate clothing and shoes, etc.)?

- *Safety devices.* Do you have appropriate safety devices on your equipment (chainbreaks on saws, roll-bars and other guards on equipment used for skidding)?
- *First aid.* Have you had basic first aid training? How long has it been? Do you have a fully stocked first aid kit where you are working?
- *Equipment.* Are you familiar with the range of tools available for a given woods task? Are you using the right tool for the job? Have you checked your equipment for wear? Have you maintained it properly (sharpened your saw chain)?
- *Fire.* Are you prepared to prevent fires while working? What is the condition of your saw's spark arrester? Do you have appropriate equipment to fight a small fire if one gets started?
- *Communication.* Are you working alone in the woods? Do you have a convenient means to contact someone in an emergency (radio or cell phone)? If you are working with someone, do you discuss safety procedures regularly? Have you established hand signals or other forms of communication for times when it is difficult to hear each other?
- *Skills.* It is one thing to cut 2-3 inch diameter saplings in a pre-commercial thinning. It is another to fall a lopsided tree, 30 inches in diameter, on a 50% slope. Be realistic about your skill level and consider hiring a professional for jobs that are beyond your skills.

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There are many sources for more information on this topic. One place to start is the literature that came with the equipment you are using to do the work. If you no longer have that literature, check with a local store that sells the same or similar products. Some manufacturers even provide instructional videos and pamphlets to help people use their equipment safely.

Another invaluable source of information is the Idaho Logging Safety Bureau. This state agency periodically visits Idaho logging operations and provides loggers with on-site and indoor first aid and safety training. To receive their quarterly newsletter that chronicles Idaho logging accidents and provides helpful advice on logging safety, contact: Idaho Logging Safety News,

Logging Safety Bureau, P.O. Box 83720, Boise, ID 83720-0048.

Whenever forest owners do their own woods work, safety is a major concern. In recent Extension field programs on small-scale logging technology and thinning and pruning, we are including a stronger safety component.

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This information first appeared in Woodland NOTES, Vol. 10, No. 1.

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