

Safety information for fallers: Summoning qualified assistance

Manual tree fallers must be provided with and follow written safe work practices acceptable to WorkSafeBC for the types of work activities they perform. These safe work practices must include procedures for summoning and providing qualified assistance to manage a falling difficulty or to deal with an emergency or injury. This bulletin outlines the potential hazards and explains the requirements for qualified assistance.



A site hazard assessment, a falling plan, and an initial safety meeting must be completed before a tree is felled in a forestry operation. The plan should show access into and throughout the operating area. It should also identify all known potential hazards identified in the site assessment, such as hang-ups, limb-tied trees, dead tops, ground hazards, pulled-up roots, windfall, slope, dangerous trees, and avalanche chutes. Hazards should be clearly identified in a corrective action log, marked on a map, and marked with ribbons on site. Fallers and employers should plan ahead to develop solutions before the fallers reach the hazards.



Employers must provide written safe work practices to fallers. These practices must include procedures for summoning and providing assistance to manage a falling difficulty or to deal with an injury or an emergency. This information can then be used in the emergency response plan (ERP) and adapted to each specific operating area in which trees will be felled.

Recognizing the hazards

A faller should be aware of existing and known hazards before starting work, but must also be prepared for unforeseen circumstances that may require qualified assistance. Fallers need qualified

assistance to be readily available in three types of situations:

- A falling difficulty: advice or assistance is needed before work can proceed, but the situation is not urgent.
- A falling emergency: urgent action is required to prevent or control a hazard or otherwise allow a quick return to normal operations. There is usually less time for planning in an emergency.
- An injury: an incident requiring first aid.

Once a faller has gained safe access into a quarter and begins falling trees, hazards may surface that were not identified during the site assessment. The faller must continually assess the work environment to ensure falling difficulties are controlled. If a falling difficulty or emergency situation arises, whether it was documented in advance or while falling, the faller must stop work and ask for qualified assistance.

Fallers have the right to refuse unsafe work. In fact, workers must not carry out (or cause to be carried out) any task that they have reasonable cause to believe would endanger the health and safety of any person.

If dangerous trees are too hazardous to fall manually, the employer is responsible for making available alternative methods to fall the tree, such as blasting with explosives or using mechanized assistance. The employer must also have resources available to address any hazard arising from an unexpected falling difficulty.

Qualified assistance

Qualified assistance must be readily available to fallers in case of difficulty, emergency, or injury. In addition, fallers must have an effective means to summon or call for assistance.

The Occupational Health and Safety Regulation defines “qualified” as “being knowledgeable of the work, the hazards involved, and the means to control the hazards, by reason of education, training, experience, or a combination thereof.”

Qualified assistance is a person (or persons) capable of effectively helping or advising a faller. The qualifications necessary will differ depending on the situation. In the case of a falling difficulty, another certified faller or qualified falling supervisor may be needed to provide advice or assistance. In the case of injury, a person with the appropriate level of first aid certification will be required.

The required response times will also depend on the type of assistance needed. First aid and emergency assistance need to be available more quickly than assistance to resolve a falling difficulty.

The person designated to provide the assistance must:

- Be prepared, equipped, and able, both physically and mentally, to promptly provide the appropriate level of qualified assistance
- Be available and have an effective method of being summoned
- Know the faller’s location
- Be trained in the requirements of safely approaching and obtaining permission to enter the hazard area (two tree lengths)
- In the case of first aid, be able to reach injured workers within 10 minutes

These expectations must be clearly outlined and well understood by all parties before falling starts. If equipment may be needed to reach a falling difficulty, it must be demonstrated that the equipment can reach the incident area in a reasonable amount of time

Summoning assistance

The means for summoning assistance will depend on the circumstances. Many fallers use radios. Other communication devices, including various new technologies, may also be effective.

A whistle is the minimum means, and should be available to all fallers. Although it is not always as effective as other methods, a whistle is fairly reliable. The whistle needs to be checked

periodically and should be fastened in a location where it can be blown even if the faller's arms are pinned. Note that a "pea" whistle may not be effective in areas where the "pea" can freeze.

If an equipment operator is providing qualified assistance, a whistle is not likely to be effective because of the noise levels of the equipment and the airtight nature of many cabs.

Safe work practices

Qualified assistance must be available in all situations, whether a faller is working alone or with a falling partner.

In a partner system, two fallers are positioned in work areas such that they can readily assist each other. The partner must have sufficient knowledge to discuss a falling or bucking difficulty or emergency, and help plan strategy. If required, the partner must be able to carry out a rescue and to slash a path for an evacuation.

A partner system is appropriate for the following:

- Working in steep areas where mechanized assistance is not possible
- Falling timber under conditions that may result in the need for advice or assistance that can only be provided by another experienced faller
- Working in areas where fallers could be pinned by rolling logs or falling trees, and cannot readily be reached by equipment capable of freeing them

A system using qualified assistance from someone other than another faller may satisfy the regulatory requirements in the following situations:

- The work is in an easily accessible location.
- A faller is able to safely wait for assistance, mark the hazard area, and inform others of the hazard.
- Fallers pinned by rolling logs or falling trees can readily be reached by qualified and properly equipped persons or equipment capable of freeing them.

- If the faller is the only faller employed at the operation, as long as:
 - Another qualified person is available to provide emergency services.
 - Another faller or qualified falling supervisor can be brought in to assist in overcoming falling difficulties.

Regulation requirements

For requirements related to qualified assistance, see the following sections of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation and its related guidelines (available on worksafebc.com).

Section 26.28, [Summoning assistance](#)

Guideline G26.28, [Summoning qualified assistance](#)

Section 26.2, [Planning and conducting a forestry operation](#)

Section 26.22(1), [Forestry operation faller training](#)

Section 26.23(2), [Procedures for falling and bucking](#)

Guideline G3.12, [Refusal of unsafe work](#)

Guideline G3.18(2), [Availability of first aid attendant](#)

Resources

The following resources are also available on worksafebc.com:

[Safety information for fallers: No stand of timber is worth your life](#)

[Emergency response planning: 12 tips for an effective emergency response plan](#)

For more info please visit www.bcforestsafesafe.org/QA