

In the fall of 2003, during a cone collection contract on the Colville NF in Washington State, an experienced contract tree climber fell ~70' from a leaning Ponderosa Pine and sustained massive injuries, but survived. The individual was **free climbing** and apparently lost his grip. His climbing partner who witnessed the fall (from the ground) said he didn't see or hear anything that indicated a branch had broken or anything unusual had happened. The climber has no memory of the incident or anything up until about 2 weeks afterward.

Because of accidents like these (there have been others), the issue of free climbing has come under more and more scrutiny, and in fact some safety managers have implemented a policy of no free climbing at all. It will be difficult to argue for continued use of the free climbing method if accidents like this continue, and probably impossible if the accident happens to someone who climbs under the guidance of the USFS tree climbing policy.

Take a moment to review Section 4.3.1, Free Climbing in the Live Crown, in the USFS Tree Climbing Guide, and the next time you climb, make sure you adhere to the standard. The primary benefit is for you; the future of the climbing program may depend on your actions as well.

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On Monday, December 1, 2003, an experienced tree climber working (as a subcontractor) on a contract with the Salem, Oregon BLM to create snags, died after falling ~100 feet from a tree. He was spur-climbing near the crown of a tree, and apparently failed to secure his lanyard to the D-ring on his saddle, resulting in a fall from the tree.

The standards we have in place, if followed, will prevent this type of tragedy. The USFS National Tree Climbing Guide in Section 4.1.2, Lanyards, states: "**Carefully inspect hardware for secure closure before placing your weight on the lanyard**". This is to just remind you of the obvious!

There is another message already circulating, from an article in a website named *counterpunch*, which claims the individual was performing red tree vole surveys in the East Fork Coquille Timber sale. While the individual may have, at some time performed these surveys at this timber sale, the accident **did not** take place there, nor for that purpose.

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