

# PF Olsen Toolbox Safety Alert 88

<b>Date:</b> June 2025	<b>Focus Group:</b> Ground Workers
<b>Topic:</b> Fatigue, Upset Conditions, and Falls	<b>Issued by:</b> Nic Steens

**Background:** A breaker-out suffered a serious back injury after slipping on steep, wet ground at the end of an extended workday. Rain had made the terrain slippery, and a line shift had prolonged the shift to 9.5 hours. At 4:30 pm, the worker fell onto a stump. Fatigue, planning, and limited mechanisation were key factors.

**Injury Details:** Initially believed to be muscle strain, X-Rays later confirmed two fractured thoracic vertebrae. The injury resulted in lost time and met WorkSafe’s threshold for a notifiable event — see [“What is a notifiable injury or illness”](#)

**Risk Awareness:** Steep, wet ground is high-risk — even with good gear. Risk increases under upset conditions like long hours and short-staffing, which add fatigue. Manual tasks on difficult terrain carry more risk than using mechanical alternatives like grapples. Slipping onto stumps or hidden debris is a common hazard, especially when handling strops near felled stems.

**Safe (and Wise) Behaviours:** To reduce risk and prevent recurrence:

- *Manage fatigue proactively:* rotate tasks and staff, cap combined work/travel hours (~10 hrs/day), spread production across the week, and take regular breaks.
- *Safe walking practices:* don’t rush, scan ahead, plan your footing, wear good spiked boots, and keep hands free for balance.
- *Maximise substitution:* use grapples or pre-bunching where possible; avoid sending people into steep areas when machines can do the job.

**For Site Manager:**

Print and complete the following:

1. Discuss with employees/operators:
2. Place on-site notice board or in file:

**Site Manager:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** / /  
(initials)

