

PF Olsen Toolbox Safety Alert 95

Date: October 2025	Focus Group: Tree Fellers
Topic: Waterlogged Soils – Unstable Trees	Issued by: Nic Steens

Background: A certified tree feller was working in a West Coast forest. Although conditions were mild with no wind, recent and ongoing heavy rain had saturated the ground. While making his top cut in the scarf, he glanced over his shoulder and saw a tree uproot and begin falling downhill toward him. He quickly moved along his escape route, narrowly avoiding being struck as the tree fell directly onto his chainsaw. He immediately ceased work and vacated the area for safety.

Injury or Damage Details: While naturally shocked, no physical injuries occurred, however, the chainsaw was destroyed by the falling tree.

Risk Awareness: Wet, waterlogged soils reduce root stability and increase the likelihood of trees uprooting, even without wind. Leaning trees, saturated root balls, and vibration from other falling trees can further destabilise surrounding trees. Even experienced fallers can be at serious risk if these conditions are present.

Safe Behaviours (for all manual and mechanised tree fellers):

- Tune into rainfall — monitor recent and ongoing wet weather for soil saturation.
- Don't fell trees if soil conditions reach saturation or if trees instability is observed.
- Maintain clear escape routes; double check surrounding trees for signs of instability.
- Use an observer in high-risk areas and while soils are drying out.
- Relocate operations if excessive rain makes terrain or tree conditions are unsafe.
- Prioritise mech-felling; (note: not possible here due to no accessible tether point).

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)

