

DEALING WITH TREES DAMAGED BY STORMS

When storms and high wind cause damage to trees, it is called “windthrow”. Windthrow can cause broken or uprooted trees which may fall and become lodged on other trees. Windthrown trees are very dangerous to work with, as they can be unstable, unpredictable and under considerable tension.

Effective planning is essential when conducting the tree felling or harvesting of windthrown trees. The use of machine assistance should be considered as the first choice.

Windthrown trees should only be felled by suitably trained competent persons. If you’re not sure about this, contact a forestry or arboriculture professional.

Hazards can include:

- » unstable root plates (a root plate is the root system and soil that is lifted above the ground with the tree when it is blown over);
- » suspended stems under high tension and compression;
- » stems wedged between standing trees;
- » stems leaning into standing trees/hang-ups (a hang-up is created when windthrown trees are hooked onto other trees);
- » uprooted trees;
- » spars (large poles used in tree harvesting, which could also fall in high winds);
- » shattered tops of trees, which create hazards on the ground;
- » suspended hazards, such as tree branches;
- » heavy trees leaning against other trees;
- » unstable trees.

Wherever possible, standing trees in amongst windthrown trees should be felled by machine, rather than manually.

Where mechanised tree felling is not possible machine-assisted tree felling and butting off (cutting off the root plate) should be used. Tree fellers must ensure that they assess all possible movements of a standing tree – or windthrown stem – once tension or compression is released, and that they plan the cuts they’re going to make before commencing.

Where manual felling is necessary the tree feller must ensure that hazards have been identified and effective controls are

implemented. Tree fellers must take particular care that unstable trees near the tree being felled are not up-rooted as a result of tree felling or butting off. Tree fellers must ensure that hazards associated with tree felling or butting off are identified and controlled before beginning. Other safety tips are:

- » Keep children away from any windfall, particularly when cutting begins.
- » Remember safety at all times—safety equipment such as footwear, leg protection, a helmet, eye protection and earmuffs are mandatory.
- » Make sure you have stable footing.
- » Have sufficient clear space to work.
- » Ensure you have an escape path cleared.
- » Ensure a clear communication system is in place for emergencies.
- » Do not work directly under wind-wrenched trees.
- » Do not put yourself in a position where a root ball (a rounded root plate) can roll towards you when released.
- » Root plates must be cut at sufficient length so the root plate has stability once cut.

For further information, see the following publications:

- » **The Approved Code of Practice for Safety and Health in Forest Operations**
- » **A Guide to Safety with Chainsaws**
- » COMPETENZ Best Practice Guidelines for Tree felling
www.competenz.org.nz

