

Safety Lessons Learned—No Tree is Safe

“Lessons Learned” is a proven method of sharing important safety messages. Based upon real-life incidents, Lessons Learned examines root causes of why an accident or injury happened, and identifies corrective actions or mitigation to reduce the chance of future accidents. Lessons Learned does not identify people by name, nor is it finger-pointing or a way to place blame. It is an honest assessment of a chain of events that helps us find proactive ways to keep us all safer, healthier, and out on the Trail.

The Activity: Working with chainsaws is a common activity along the Ice Age Trail, and arguably comes with more potential risks than any other volunteer task. The following is an Ice Age Trail example of a Near Miss accident which could have easily resulted in serious injury.

What Happened: A work project was underway involving sawyers felling red cedar trees. One sawyer had already made a face cut on the tree he intended to drop, and was making the back cut when he felt the tree “sit back” on his saw bar. He needed to pound in a wedge before completing his back cut. Looking around, he noticed that his hammer was on the ground in the path of where he intended to fell the tree. The sawyer self-reported that he considered it safe to retrieve the hammer. As he was picking it up with his back turned to the tree, the tree fell at that moment, landing approximately 5 feet away from the sawyer.

The Lessons Learned:

- The sawyer stated that he felt it was safe to retrieve his hammer from the intended fall path of the tree that already had a face cut and partial back cut. Why? In Lesson #1 of *Trail Safe!*, we find the over-riding message about Human Behavior that connects all Lessons together. It states: “It rarely matters what we tell an adult to do, it only matters what that person perceives the situation to be at that final moment when they make a decision, their personal assessment of risk, the probability of success, and the consequences of failure.” ~ Craig Geis, California Training Institute
- In considering the Human Factor of safety, we often examine Risk vs Gain. Were the gains of retrieving the hammer so great that they outweighed the risk in this incident? No.
- In all things we do, we need to constantly pause, and assess our situation and surroundings. This is never more true than when working with or near chainsaws. Taking the time to think through all possible steps of this activity may have revealed that the hammer was out of reach before the chainsaw was put to use.
- Even so, once the mistake had been realized, what was the risk in maintaining control of the area long enough to call for another hammer from a safe location? Much less than retrieving the one forgotten on the ground.
- Thinking through the entire series of work processes to develop the best game plan is called the 7-Step “Optimizing Strategy” for Operational Risk Management. Please take a few moments to review it in *Trail Safe!* Lesson 4, Mission Analysis.

Thank you to everyone for not only building and caring for the Ice Age National Scenic Trail, but for also working together to keep each other safe and healthy along the way. Be Trail Safe!