

Narrative

On June 9, 2025, a saw team of 4 sawyers was dispatched to the area of Bonham, Texas to assist with the cleanup from a tornado that hit the town the night before. The saw team arrived at the ICP around 1300 and were then split into 2 squads.

Squad 1 was comprised of Sawyer 1, a FAL3(t), and Sawyer 2, a FAL2(t). Squad 1 was told to help clear roads to allow access for first responders and utility crews starting in an assigned block of town, and to clear the downed trees blocking roads, block by block, working their way back to the ICP.



Figure 1. Storm damage similar to what Sawyers 1 and 2 were working in.

Around 1600, after Squad 1 had already cleared two blocks, they found another section of road that needed attention. Sawyer 1 was making cuts on one end of a pile of downed trees while Sawyer 2 was working on the other side of the pile to clear the road faster. During Sawyer 1's second cut on a limb, this 4-inch diameter limb pushed the saw onto their leg at an unknown throttle position.

Sawyer 2 was finishing a cut and witnessed the limb push the saw into Sawyer 1's leg. Sawyer 2 immediately shut down their saw to provide any aid that was needed. Sawyer 1's PPE had done its job and had prevented any injury. After Sawyer 2 had completed an assessment for injuries, Sawyer 1 contacted their supervisors and reported what happened and that there were no injuries.

As a result of this chap strike, Sawyer 1 was relieved of saw duties for the rest of the day to rest and ensure they stayed in a healthy mental space.

"As soon as I started cutting, I felt a little rushed, probably the reason leading to this accident. I should have slowed down a little and taken a breather.

As I was starting to cut the limbs off the tree, I was in an uncomfortable position. So I switched my hand positions, putting my left hand on the trigger handle and my right hand on the front handle. I noticed as I was cutting, the 4-inch diameter limb came to me with downward pressure.

At that point, it was too late for me to stop the limb, causing the 4-inch limb to push into my saw with enough pressure to push the chainsaw bar and chain into my agency provided Kevlar chaps."

Sawyer 1



Figure 2. Sawyer 1 was cutting with their left hand on the throttle and their right hand on the front handle. But due to body placement, they cut their right leg.



Figure 3. After opening the cut, it can be seen how the chainsaw had gone through the outer shell and the first layer of Kevlar and stopped in the second layer of Kevlar.

“When the chainsaw bar hit my chaps, I immediately stopped and realized I struck my chaps and got really irritated with myself.”

Sawyer 1



Figure 4. Long Kevlar fibers hanging from out of the clutch cover.

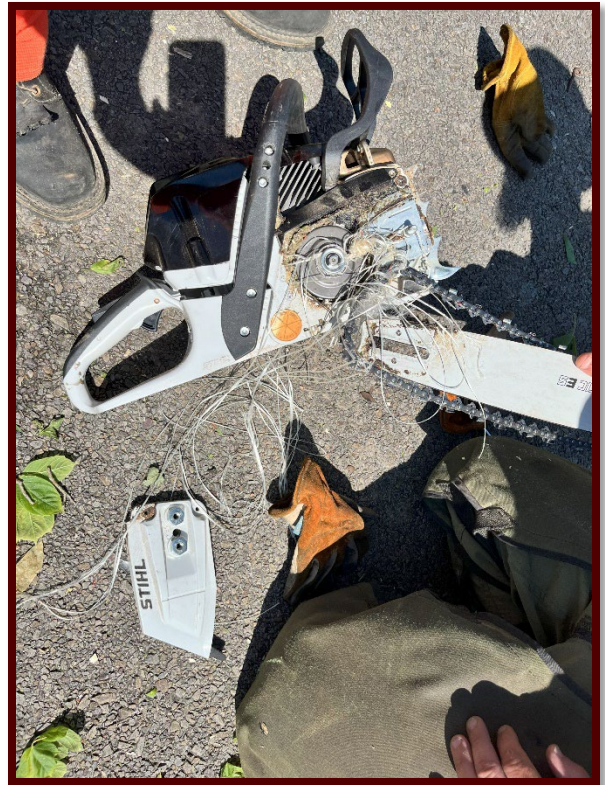


Figure 5. The sprocket was completely clogged-up with Kevlar fibers and stopped the saw instantly.

"It truly was not scary that I struck my chaps. These chaps did what they were made to do and stopped the saw from cutting into my leg."

Sawyer 1

Lessons Learned

When responding to storm damage, sawyers often find themselves in stressful and demanding situations. Storm response creates pressure to clear hazards to public safety and restore a sense of normalcy to the residents.

Storms can knock down powerlines and power poles, stack and pile full grown trees, and twist debris amongst piles. With pressure from overhead and external sources, sawyers may be pushed to make cuts they are uncomfortable with or are excessively hazardous.

Considerations for mitigating these hazards when cutting storm damage:

1. **Slow Down.** Do not let the situation force you to cut objects out of your experience level or at a faster rate than you are prepared for. Always fall back on your training and return to the basics. Piles and downed trees should be sized-up like any other standing tree. You should cut at your skill and comfort level.
 2. *Do I have to cut what I am cutting?* If what you are asked to cut is too dangerous or above your skill level, do not be afraid to turn the assignment down and find another option.
 3. While cutting, watch what the tree or limb is doing as you cut. As you are cutting the object, small movements can warn you before a bar is pinched or something shifts.
 4. When given an assignment, ensure that it is within your scope of work and the agency's standard operating procedures.
 5. When you are tired or hot, stop and take extra breaks. Working when fatigued increases the risk of a life-altering accident. Drink extra water and take opportunities to rest to reduce the likelihood of accidents.
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