

## 24 Stung By hornets—Insp # 1683499 Xylem Trees Experts

A 47 year old male was stung more than 20 times and died from his injuries while attempting to rig a climbing line in a tree that needed to be felled when he disturbed a hornets nest that was in an adjacent tree.

The team lead (victim's) plan for the day was to have an apprentice climber climb the tree and perform the cutting operations from an elevated position. The victim donned his climbing gear and began an ascent of a neighboring tree to set a climbing line for the apprentice climber to use and perform his work in the tree. The victim was certified to perform climbing operations and perform rescues, if necessary. He set the climb line approximately 40 feet off of the ground. It was then that he was attacked by suspected bald faced hornets and during the encounter was stung approximately 20 times.

Members of the crew who were interviewed stated that victim yelled that he saw a wasp and then began to receive the stings. His safety glasses fell to the ground near another team member. The Apprentice Climber yelled to the victim to get down from the tree. The victim was able to drop about 4" from his original position, but his line became stuck during the attack.

The Apprentice climber and another member of the crew quickly talked, and the apprentice climber went to the truck to grab the first-aid kit which contained Benadryl and some bottled water. When the apprentice climber arrived back at the scene, the victim stated that he couldn't descend and that he was stuck. The other crewman started to put on his climbing gear and the apprentice climber returned to the truck for the belay gear. When he arrived back at the worksite the crewman was stepping back out of his harness. The crewman stated that he was scared to climb the tree due to the swarm of hornets. The victim signaled to the crew to remain on the ground and not to climb.

The crew that was on the ground was trying to talk the victim into cutting his main line and using his safety line to descend. The crews always climb with a safety line as a backup system. The ground crew called the General Foreman and informed him of the situation. The foreman was just a few miles away from the worksite. Once on site, the foreman began to don his climbing gear. During this time the victim was conscious and talking with the ground crew. The foreman safely lowered the victim to the ground where EMS took the victim to the hospital.

It was stated that from the onset of the incident to placing the victim in the care of Hamilton County EMS was approximately 20 minutes. The preliminary cause of death was noted as Cardiac Arrhythmia. The deceased suffered from Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy and the manner of death was listed as natural. Complications between medications/drugs, hornet stings, and cardiovascular issues all could have contributed to the death of victim.

The death is work related due to the victim suffering from complications due to the suspected bald-faced hornet stings that the employee received.

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### **Citation(s) as Originally Issued**

A complete inspection was conducted at the accident scene. Some of the items cited may not directly relate to the fatality.

No citations issued.



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