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**ARBORIST NEWS**



# Networking Education Safety

— 2016 ITCC Highlights



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# Worksite Safety Starts with Good Communication!

By Rip Tompkins, member of the ISA International Safety Committee

*Take this article with you to your next crew safety briefing! Start a conversation. Be an example. Make inroads for a better safety culture today.*

Working in and around trees entails certain risks. We are often working in dead, dying, diseased, or damaged trees. The strength of the anchor points we use—of the limbs and branch unions—is not a known quantity. As arborists, it is imperative that we make *smart* decisions about the trees we climb and work in. And although there are inherent risks associated with working in trees, there are additional risks that affect our overall safety just as much.

To frame this discussion more frankly, how we go about doing our job determines whether what we do will keep us safe or if it will make us a statistic.

I vote that we all make a pledge to work smartly and safely. One only has to look at monthly accident reports

to see that even with all the new technology, equipment, and techniques, there are still too many people getting hurt or dying when working in and around trees.

When I look at many of these accidents/incidents, it makes me cringe. So many of them seem preventable. One common theme keeps popping up in my head as I read these reports (especially the large number of struck-bys): poor jobsite communication!

The best way to begin a safe and productive day at the job site is with a thorough job briefing. This involves all members of the team discussing the various aspects of the job and deciding which team members will play which roles. The best way to ensure the job site stays safe and productive is to communicate all throughout the day. Put simply, good communication is integral to keeping the job site safe and avoiding accidents (unplanned events). Tree work is a team effort; one person can't do the job alone.

One good model for a job briefing includes using the acronym H.O.P.E. This should be done with the whole crew and should involve a walk around the site, identifying hazards. *Hazards* are things that can hurt us, both jobsite hazards and tree hazards. *Obstacles* are things that we can hurt or damage, such as homes, landscapes, personal property, and other people. Can the hazards be worked around? Do obstacles need to be moved or protected? Most importantly, a *plan* needs to be created, discussing how the work will flow and who will perform which tasks. It is so often the failure to plan on the job site that leads to catastrophe. Finally, what *equipment* will be needed to carry out the plan?

An important part of an overall work plan is to make sure everyone has and uses the proper PPE (personal protective equipment) and that a fully stocked first-aid kit is readily available. It is also important to make sure there is cell phone or two-way radio coverage at the job site in case of an emergency. If there is not coverage, a plan needs to be made on how best to contact emergency services if they are needed. Make sure everyone knows the physical address of the job site in case they need to make the call. Also, remember that if unforeseen circumstances arise, it is best to regroup and refine the plan.



BRYAN KOTWICA

A voice command-and-response system ensures workers and non-workers are outside the drop zone while a cut is being made. If a ground worker needs to enter the drop zone, they need to issue a "coming underneath" and wait for an "all clear" from the climber before proceeding.

## The H.O.P.E. Approach Hazards Obstacles Plan Equipment

### Communicating Effectively

Once the work has begun, it is important to keep the lines of communication open and active. This is especially true when there are workers aloft, either climbing or in an aerial lift, and there are workers on the ground. Unfortunately, struck-bys remain one of the leading types of accidents on the job site in the tree care industry. This often involves someone being hit by a falling piece of equipment or by a falling tree or tree part—and the ground workers are usually the ones getting hit.

Historically, I think communication in the tree care industry has tended to be a one-way street, usually the worker aloft yelling “headache” or “head’s up” as a piece of wood is about to fall out of a tree. This assumes that the ground workers (or pedestrians) heard the call and moved out of the way. Often, this is not the case, the command may not have been heard, or the ground worker may not have been able to move fast enough. Communication is also imperative during tree felling. The cutter shall ensure that workers and non-workers not involved in the process stay at least two tree lengths away. Workers handling pull lines/tag lines shall be outside of the striking distance of the tree, preferably at a distance of 1.5 tree lengths.

A simple voice command-and-response communication system can be very effective. This involves a dialogue between workers and an understanding that no one *assumes* their command has been heard, they *make sure* of it. An example would be a climber making a command, such as,

“stand clear,” before a piece of wood is cut or before an unsecured piece of equipment is used. The climber then waits for the “all clear” or “go ahead” response from the ground before proceeding. Once given this response, the climber technically owns this “drop zone” area beneath him/her. Ground workers should not enter this area until they have communicated a command such as “coming underneath” and received an “all clear” from the climber. Once given, the ground workers then own the area until further stated.

Using this running dialogue between ground workers and aerial workers will ensure that one hand always knows what the other is doing. The voice command/response system also pertains to ground-only operations, such as throwline use during tree felling, or at any time when someone is at risk of injury. Because tree work sites are often noisy, it may be hard to hear voice commands. Hand signals can be an effective form of communication as long as they are discussed in advance and are well-understood by the various team members.

An efficient tree crew that works like a team, where everyone knows their roles, will be a more productive crew. A crew that communicates well together will be a safer crew and avoid costly and demoralizing accidents. Safety and productivity can walk hand in hand. Also, don’t ever assume that someone has heard your warnings or commands. Plan your work and work your plan.

Please work safely!

**Next steps:** Discuss with your crew the use of the H.O.P.E. system and try it on your next job site. Make sure everyone knows where the drop zone is and formalize a communication plan for working within the drop zone. **A•N**

*The best way to begin a safe and productive day at the job site is with a thorough job briefing. Good communication is integral to keeping the job site safe and avoiding accidents.*

### Trees in Trouble

*Trees in Trouble*, directed by Andrea Torrice, tells the story of America’s urban and community forests: their history, their growing importance to our health, economy, and environment, and the serious threats they now face. This documentary shows how community-wide efforts can save and protect the urban forests for future generations.

- Media type:** documentary film
- Length:** 27 minutes
- Where to watch:** check your local PBS schedule
- Additional info:** [www.treesintrouble.com](http://www.treesintrouble.com)

### MULTIMEDIA SPOTLIGHT

