



TREE FUND Report



Fall 2014

Are You a Freak Accident Waiting to Happen?

by Scott Jamieson, Bartlett Tree Experts



“It was a freak accident.” How many times have you heard that phrase, and what exactly does it mean? I’ve met some freaks in my life and I suppose if they were involved in an accident the phrase would fit nicely. The reality is that the phrase is often used to categorize an accident that was so unusual, so unpredictable as to be unpreventable. Research tells us, however, that there are very few, if any, unpreventable accidents. The term “freak accident” is often a means for people to avoid looking at how the accident could have been prevented.

There is a fair amount of research around safety and safe work practices outside our industry. Safety research runs the gamut, offering engineering, behavioral, cultural and even psychological approaches to improving workforce safety. As I looked back over many years of arboriculture research funded by the various trusts, projects devoted to tree worker safety were scarce. Most research has targeted the trees, not those who work in them.

In 2000, Sharon Lilly made the first gift to the TREE Fund’s new [Safe Arborist Techniques Fund](#), created to fund research into better ways to keep tree care professionals from injury. Today the fund balance is over \$200,000, and earnings have funded extensive research focusing on biomechanics and workforce safety. TREE Fund research projects have addressed how trees fail, how trees move, perceptions involved in tree risk assessment, and stress and load management in various rigging operations. A recent Hyland Johns Grant is supporting an industry-wide survey of work practices, safety concerns and risk factors associated with tree pruning.

This is all good news. In my 30 years in tree care I have seen the industry reject a culture where injury and even death seemed to be just “part of the job.” Our testosterone-fueled “If you’re not hurt you’re a sissy” culture is changing for the better. “Safety above all else” and “No one in our family gets hurt” are the new mantras of progressive tree care companies. Yet there is always more to do; the road to tree worker safety must be a journey of continuous improvement. As our profession continues to evolve, we need research devoted to keeping our workers healthy as much as we need research to keep our trees healthy. A culture of “safety above all else” needs to be supported with scientifically proven methods, practices and equipment dedicated to keeping the workforce safe.

As a Tour rider I’ve found a way to support the cause by promoting the Safe Arborist Techniques Fund in my fundraising campaign. But with so much at stake, a donation to the Safe Arborist Techniques Fund should be on every tree worker’s To-Do list. You don’t need to ride a bike to support safe arboriculture. You don’t even need to get out of your chair. [Get it done](#). And stay safe out there.

