

Telling Worker Stories: Preventing Palm Tree Trimmer Fatalities

Twenty-six tree trimmers died on the job in California between 2012–2015.

The Challenge

The California Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (CA/FACE) program at the California Department of Public Health investigated the deaths of three workers who died while trimming palm trees in Southern California. When a tree trimmer cuts or pulls on dead palm fronds, adjacent fronds or an entire ring of fronds may collapse and encase the worker, causing pressure on the worker's chest and suffocation.

The Response

CA/FACE developed a digital story in [published April 21, 2014] using photos, news footage, worker accounts, and investigation findings to tell the tragic story of Roberto, a 35-year old tree trimmer, who died of suffocation when the palm fronds he was cutting fell on him. This video is best used as an educational trigger to kick off a worker training session and facilitate discussion.

The digital story highlighted key recommendations to prevent deaths among palm tree trimmers. Only workers who are certified by organizations such as the Tree Care Industry Association or the International Society of Arboriculture should perform or supervise palm tree trimming. Fronds should be removed by workers using an aerial device and wearing fall protection, or workers should use tree climbing procedures that place them above the fronds. Homeowners should only hire tree trimming companies that have a current tree service contractor's license.



The Impact

The videos (in English and Spanish) have received 110,000 YouTube views as of July 2017 and continue to be promoted to employers, workers, trade associations, health and safety professionals, and homeowners. Nationally, the videos have been praised as a valuable training tool, and a powerful personal story that has raised awareness of palm tree trimming hazards and proper climbing techniques.

"These personal stories resonate with viewers and prevent worker deaths."
-**Laura Styles**, CA/FACE Program Manager

For more information, visit our website: www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/ohb-face

Palm Tree Digital story (English): <http://bit.ly/face-palmtree>

Palm Tree Digital story (Spanish): <http://bit.ly/face-palmtree-spanish>