

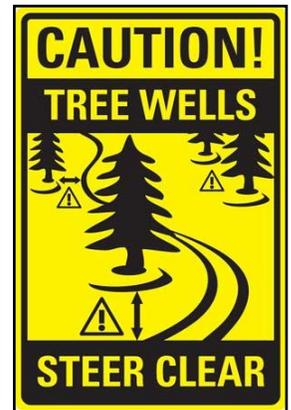
Forest Industry Safety Alert

HAZARD ALERT: Tree Wells A potentially fatal trap in the snow

Location: Houston, BC area

Date of Incident: February 2, 2012 (*Note: This alert has been re-posted as a timely reminder of this seasonal hazard*)

Details of Incident: As a worker stepped away from his snowmobile, he fell in a deep tree well of a small balsam. The tree well had over 6 feet of snow depth. The fallen worker's head was below the level of his co-worker's feet on top of the snow.



The co-worker was able to help the worker by carefully digging enough snow away from the worker and then using the snowmobile, which was on packed ground, as a base of support for pulling the worker out. No injuries occurred.

Related Information:

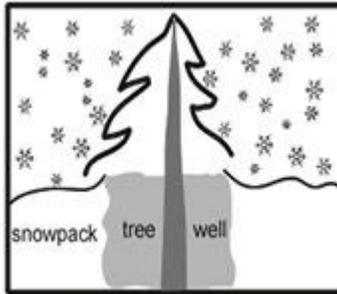
The branches of the tree shelter the area surrounding the tree trunk from snowfall. Thus a pocket of air or loose snow can form in the vicinity of the trunk. The risk of encountering a tree well is greatest during and immediately following a heavy snowstorm.

Low hanging branches further contribute to forming a tree well, as they efficiently shelter the area surrounding the trunk. It is a potential risk with trees in deep snow no matter the diameter of



the tree. Wells can also occur near rocks, along streams and in heavy regen with snow press.

When a person falls into a tree-well, it's incredibly difficult to climb back out. The loose snow can prevent the person from breathing, resulting in what is known as a Non-Avalanche Related Snow Immersion Death, or, in plain English, suffocation by snow.



Two experiments conducted in the U.S. and Canada found that 90 per cent of volunteers who were placed temporarily in tree wells were unable to rescue themselves. Furthermore, it was also noted that most people will not call out for help right away as they either feel that they should be able to dig themselves out or are embarrassed to ask for help. However, the more the person struggles the more entrapped in the snow they become as more snow falls into the hole, re-burying them.

Calling for assistance should be your first course of action. Take precautions working in areas where deep tree wells are a concern!

Recommended Preventative Actions:

Here are some suggestions for avoiding and dealing with entrapment if you fall in a deep tree well:

- Work in pairs.
- If you slide into a well try to remain upright. Landing head first creates a much deadlier scenario.
- Grab a tree trunk or branch, or hug the tree if possible. Anything to stay above the surface!
- Yell, radio or use a whistle to alert partners. Getting help en route may save your life, especially as fatigue and hypothermia may become a factor.
- Create and maintain a direct line of air if your head is below the snow line. Being able to breathe is priority.
- Try to remain calm and wait for help. Move your body carefully in a rocking manner to hollow out and pack the snow. This will give you space and air.



As a co-worker:

- Know where your partner is working and remain in close distance/ communication.
- Remember, if your partner is buried under the snow, time is of the essence and your quick actions to pull or dig them out are your partner's best hope for survival. In most cases, you are the only hope.
- Make sure the ground you are standing on is packed and will not cause a further cave in. Radio for help, but stay there until you have recovered your partner. Make attempts to uncover the head first and help create an airway.
- When you uncover their head, make sure there is no snow in the mouth and that they can breathe. Proceed to help dig them out, but ensure that the direct line of air is maintained.

This winter has seen a high volume of snow. Always be alert and watch your footing around the base of a tree or large rocks. Slow down when approaching these dangerous zones and make sure that your footing is on ground that will hold you. If you feel yourself starting to sink down, try to back away to avoid sliding into the well.

For your safety, you should assume all trees have a hazardous tree well.

Fortunately, the risk of falling into a tree well is completely avoidable.

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