

# Fatal Injuries Due to Logs Rolling Off Trucks at Sawmills

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Kentucky Injury Prevention and Research Center • University of Kentucky

Logging is one of the most hazardous occupations in the nation as well as Kentucky. During 1994-1998, 45 fatalities in Kentucky were related to logging. Of those deaths, 7 were due to logs rolling off trucks at sawmills. The workers were all males and aged 31-64 years. Their experience varied from less than 1 year to more than 25 years. Below are brief case reports of three fatal events, followed by recommendations for prevention of similar events.

## *Case Reports*

A 52-year-old self-employed logger who had at least 25 years of experience was using the family-owned truck to haul a load of logs to the mill. The standards (vertical stakes) on the flatbed truck were approximately three feet high with the logs stacked 3-4 feet above them. When he arrived at the mill he began the unloading procedure alone. After unhooking the chains on one side he walked to the other side of the vehicle to unfasten the chain attached on that side. As he did so, a log rolled off, struck him on the back of the head and pinned him on the ground.

A 51-year-old self-employed logger hauled a load of logs to the sawmill. The logs were overloaded above the standards and secured by two chains on the flatbed single-axle truck. As he began to loosen the second chain, a log from the top rolled off and struck him.

A 63-year-old logger was with his two nephews as they drove two truck loads of logs to the mill. The logs were stacked at least twice as high as the standards on the sides of the flatbed trailers. As one nephew began to unchain the logs from his truck, the logger walked up to the truck, out of view of his nephew. When the chains were released, a log rolled off and struck the logger, pinning him underneath.

## *In all seven cases:*

- The logs exceeded the height of the vertical standards on the truck by 3-4 feet
- The trucks were parked on fairly level ground
- The logs were not held in place by a loader or other equipment when the chains/binders/straps were released
- The logs fell from a stationary truck at a sawmill after the logger or driver released the binders
- No personal protective equipment (PPE) was used

## *To prevent similar incidents:*

- The height of the stack of logs should not exceed the height of the standards on the truck.
- Logs should be secured with a grapple or other device before releasing the binders.
- Sawmill owners should develop and enforce written policies regarding unloading procedures to ensure the safe working conditions for mill employees, loggers and truck drivers.
- An unbinding cage should be used at the mill to protect the workers during unloading procedures.

## *In addition,*

- Loggers should attend the Kentucky Master Logger program which includes education and training on safe logging practices (for more information call 1-800-859-6006)

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Kentucky FACE is an occupational fatality surveillance and intervention project. Its purpose is to gather data on work-related fatalities in Kentucky and to develop recommendations for prevention which are disseminated to employers, workers, agencies with interests in public health and others who may be in a position to effect change.

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