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Logging School Saves Lives

Steve Chapman, a logger and sawmill operator in Neosho, Missouri is alive today because of a class he almost walked out on. Last year he was trimming a four-inch limb from a pine tree he had felled, an operation that is usually of no consequence. But, this limb was wedged into another tree creating a tension in the limb that caused it to break before it was completely cut. This sudden release of tension turned the limb into a four-inch club that violently drove the chainsaw into the hard hat Chapman was wearing.

Steve gives full credit for wearing his hard hat to the Professional Timber Harvester (PTH) training, sponsored by a partnership between the Missouri Forest Products Association (MFPA) and the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC). Before participating in the course in 1998-99 he admits he never wore protective gear such as a hard hat, ear protection, or loggers' chaps. "The course saved my life," explained Chapman, "I use the safety lessons and cutting techniques every day I am in the woods, and demand the same of my crew."

"As a professional logger," Chapman explained, "I took the course because I'm always looking for a better, easier way to log. Initially, some of us were skeptical about what we could learn to improve our business. The instructor seemed to sense what we were thinking. The next thing we knew he dropped a tree a full 120 degrees away from the direction all of us thought it would have to fall. Besides getting our full attention for the rest of the course, he avoided damaging a whole stand of young walnut trees that would have otherwise been smashed by the felled tree."

Chapman is on MFPA's Education & Technical Affairs Committee which oversees the logger training. He strongly encourages his fellow loggers to take the PTH class. "It is well worth the time and course cost when considering savings in operating costs and potential personal injury," stated Chapman. Missouri Wood Industry Insurance Trust (MWIIT), an MFPA endorsed carrier for workmans' compensation insurance relies heavily on MFPA's PTH program to instill an attitude of safety in Missouri loggers. Trust Administrator, Darin Crisman added, "Logging claims can be very severe and our injury rate mirrors data which suggests logging is one of the most hazardous jobs in the U.S. According to the national bureau of labor statistics, logging fatality rate is 21 times higher than the fatality rate for all workers in the U.S."

To date, over 500 loggers, agency personnel, and landowners have taken the Professional Timber Harvester course. Over 240 professional loggers are currently certified, meaning they have completed the PTH training and have completed at least one additional logger training course each year since.

The PTH training enables loggers to work with foresters and landowners to best meet the landowner's objectives regarding what the composition of the remaining stand will look like, how wildlife will be affected, and how haul roads can be used for ongoing sustainable forest management and fire management activities. They have a more complete picture of how their operations impact the forest ecology on each job. After completing the course, loggers understand that implementing PTH techniques will help ensure healthy and sustainable forests for generations to come.

For more information or to register for the Professional Timber Harvester program contact Missouri Forest Products Association, 611 East Capitol Avenue, Suite One, Jefferson City, Missouri 65101-3038, call them at 573-634-3252, or visit www.moforest.org