

Blowdown Safety

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There is no such thing as a "routine" blow-down. Look it over from all angles. Talk about it among your group. Is it attached to the ground, and, if so, how is it attached? Pay close attention to its top end. Is it hung in trees that are pushing it in some direction? Is the trunk bending or otherwise indicating where stresses are building? Plan what will happen when the tree is cut. Be especially wary of high trees that leaning against other trees. Don't be afraid to voice your opinion.

If you have *any* reservations about a situation, *don't* do it. There are always experienced members in the club. For that matter, we can always call on Forest help. Never feel compelled or obligated to handle a situation you are not comfortable with. Don't be afraid to say "no."

Never rush. It is often a good idea to cut limbs well off the trail that reduce and the potential for binding situations, before tackling the section actually across the trail, even if it takes a lot of time. Granted, this is often easier said than done when knows there are still many down trees in front of you.

When cutting, it is often a good idea to stop to reevaluate the situation. Is the cut opening (or pinching) in the expected direction? Is the trunk bending or indicating forces that may not have been noticed before cutting began? If things are not going as expected, figure out why before continuing, and change your plans accordingly. The closer one comes to breaking through, the more dangerous situation becomes. One can not stop too often.

Listen to the tree. Creaking and cracking noises are usually not good. If heard, do not stick around. Get away, and give some time for things to happen and things to settle down. Reapproach with extreme caution.

If you are not actually involved in cutting, keep a safe distance (and double what you first think is a safe distance) from the actual worksite.

Above all, in the words ending the opening monologue of a once-popular television police show, "Let's be careful out there!"

Adapted from The Virginia Hiker, newsletter of the Natural Bridge Appalachian Trail Club.