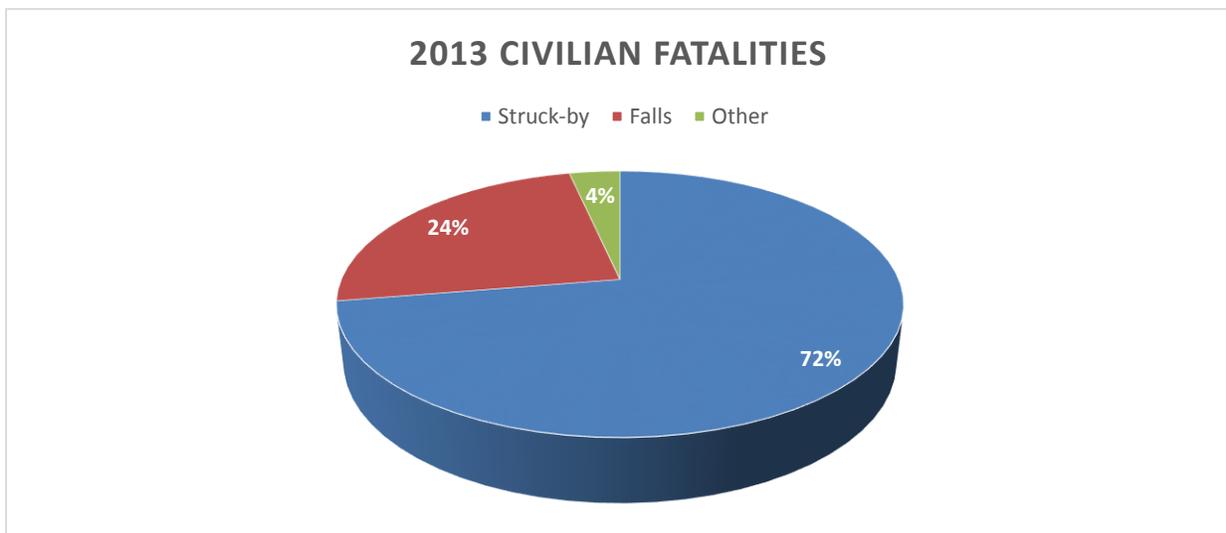


# The Dangers of “Do-It-Yourself” Tree Care

## *An Analysis of Tree Care-Related Civilian Fatalities in 2013*

The Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA) reviewed 45 civilian tree care-related accidents reported by the media in 2013. Of these accidents, 28 (62 percent) were fatal. The average age of the victim was 52. These accidents involved homeowners who attempted “do-it-yourself” tree work.

These statistics do not represent all – or even most – of the tree care accidents involving non-professionals. These were simply the accidents sensational enough to be reported by the media on the day they happened. Even so, these statistics provide insight into the types of hazards that one is likely to encounter while attempting tree work.



“These accidents serve as a stark reminder of the dangers homeowners face when conducting their own tree work, and highlight the need for tree owners to seek out tree care companies with the proper qualifications and equipment to handle the work safely,” said Peter Gerstenberger, Senior Advisor for Safety, Standards & Compliance for TCIA. “Because tree care involves dangerous procedures such as pruning large limbs, felling trees and climbing trees, it is best to outsource the job to a trained professional.”

Investigating the major causes of accidents in the above graphic revealed the following trends:

### **Struck-bys**

Thirty people were injured – 21 of them fatally – when they were struck by some object while performing tree work. Typically there were struck by the tree itself (18 of 30) or a tree limb (8 of 30).

Two civilians were injured when they were struck by a car while attempting to clear a fallen tree from the roadway. One homeowner was struck by a chainsaw. Finally, a caring spouse was injured when she was struck by her falling husband, because of his own tree care mishap.

**Lessons:** Successful tree felling and large limb removal involves accurate assessment of the lean, weight distribution, and other forces acting on the tree as well as internal defects that can affect how the tree will react. These are just a few of the important factors. A professional tree faller uses a precise face cut (wedge, undercut) and back cut, and possibly ropes and felling wedges, to control the tree's or branch's direction of fall.

## Falls

There were 14 falls in the media in 2013. Six of the 10 falls from trees and one of the four falls from ladders were fatal.

**Lessons:** Cut branches – especially large ones cut with a chainsaw - almost invariably hit the base of the ladder as they fall, wiping out the ladder. Homeowners fall out of trees typically because they are not secured and lose their balance. A sure recipe for disaster involves mixing height, large falling or swinging masses, a powerful chainsaw, and inexperience with any or all of the aforementioned ingredients.

## Case Study

Forty-four of the forty-five accidents we analyzed were classified as either Struck-bys or Falls. The final accident is so unique – and yet in some ways so representative – that we thought it best to relate a summary of the news account:

“A 70-year-old gentleman in Fenton, MI scaled 65 feet of tree in his backyard for what he thought would be routine tree trimming. Unfortunately, this routine tree trimmer needed rescuing after he had nearly completed his yard work.

‘I went to cut a limb over my head and lost concentration for a split second,’ the gentleman said. ‘The limb went the wrong way, the rope got caught on my foot and broke it, and I couldn’t get down. I was just trying to save some money and do it myself, but one second of carelessness can wreak havoc.’”

###

Founded in 1938, TCIA is a public and professional resource on trees and arboriculture. It has more than 2,000 member companies who recognize stringent safety and performance standards and who are required to carry liability insurance. TCIA also has the nation's only Accreditation program that help consumers find tree care companies that have been inspected and accredited based on: adherence to industry standards for quality and safety; maintenance of trained, professional staff; and dedication to ethics and quality in business practices. For more, visit [www.tcia.org](http://www.tcia.org) or [www.treecaretips.org](http://www.treecaretips.org).

If you'd like more information about this topic, or to schedule an interview with Peter Gerstenberger, please contact Amy Tetreault at (603) 314-5380 or [atetreault@tcia.org](mailto:atetreault@tcia.org).