

San Gabriel Valley Tribune

Man electrocuted while trimming tree

Investigation launched into mysterious death

By Marianne Love
Staff Writer

Saturday, June 25, 2005 - BALDWIN PARK -- A 45-year-old El Monte tree trimmer was electrocuted Friday in an ash tree 20 feet off the ground in the back yard of a Baldwin Park home.

Details leading to the fatality were unknown and an investigation was launched by several agencies, authorities said.

Feliciano Orozco worked for Asplundh Tree Expert Co., a nationwide business contracted by Southern California Edison. He was with another man who told authorities he didn't see what happened because he was on the ground at the time of the incident.

The worker said he heard Orozco yell. He said he tried to help, but the tree was hot to the touch and he was scared.

Len Renner, who lives at the house in the 3500 block of Puente Avenue, said his 16-year-old granddaughter reported the incident to authorities when the other worker came to the door.

"It's very unfortunate. A couple of years ago they came in and cut the trees and went out unnoticed," Renner said.

County fire spokesman Ed Osorio said a 9-1-1 call was received at 10:21 a.m. When firefighters arrived at 10:26 a.m. the man's body was twitching.

"They could still hear the current flowing. They had to wait until Southern California Edison came to turn off the power at 11:05 a.m.," he said.

About 12,000 volts of electricity flowed through Orozco's body until then. Osorio said the dead man's foot was found on a bare, telephone-support line in the trees.

"Normally, it isn't a big deal, but he was grounded. The tree was green enough to carry the current. A cutting saw was found in a neighbor's yard and a pruning tool was in the tree," Osorio said.

Orozco, wearing a long-sleeved shirt and strapped into his safety harness, was cut down around 1:30 p.m.

About 40 customers lost power for a couple of hours, Edison spokesman Steven Conroy said.

Conroy said this type of fatality doesn't happen often. He said Asplundh employees are trained and certified.

"He was removing limbs and was in close proximity to the line. He became involved with a high-tension wire," Conroy said. "It's very unfortunate."

Jose Luis Romero, who lives nearby, said he worked as a tree trimmer a few years ago, but quit because the job was too dangerous.

"You need common sense with good judgment and it all comes into play, but it's still an extremely dangerous job," the 45-year-old West Covina resident said. "You're overworked and underpaid."

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