



Safety Notice

Dear Agency Partners, ATC, Clubs & Volunteers,

This week we had our 6th known fatality on/associated with the Appalachian National Scenic Trail for 2018. On August 21, 2018, while hiking with a group approximately 1 mile north of Ashby Gap, VA, a 71 year old male was struck on the head by a falling ~6 inch tree limb. “Widowmakers” are tree limbs that become unattached and hang as silent killers that pose a risk to personnel working under or hiking around the tree. This term has been used widely in land management agencies and by outdoor recreation communities, and is even officially recognized by OSHA. These limbs can become dislodged by wind or during tree felling, and are responsible for 11% of all fatal chainsaw accidents. The U.S. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) offers ways to eliminate risks associated with widowmakers.

- If possible, **do not camp or stage directly underneath tall trees.** This is the only sure-fire way to avoid widowmaker branches.
- Be extra cautious around trees that look dead or damaged. They pose the greatest risk.
- If you’re in a heavily-forested area, keep an eye out for dead or broken branches in the canopy above you.
- High winds, excessive rains and snowfall can increase the risks by weakening or dislodging branches. Take care in these conditions.
- When you do notice a potential widowmaker branch, avoid it. Should you spot a widowmaker adjacent to known areas of high visitation, report it as soon as practical through the appropriate channels.

Unfortunately, being in the outdoors has a potential risk that is often unseen and therefore is hard to mitigate. As we near the end of summer we can often get complacent about our surroundings. This incident serves as a tragic reminder that when you are out working on and enjoying this amazing Trail that we are all protecting for future generations, remember to look up, down, and all around. Stay Safe!



Carin Farley, Acting Chief Ranger @ Appalachian National Scenic Trail

Phone: (304) 535-6170

Email: carin_farley@nps.gov