

AFAG 09/07

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**HEALTH AND SAFETY EXECUTIVE
ARBORICULTURE AND FORESTRY ADVISORY GROUP**

Current Demographics of the Tree-Work Industry

Paper for AFAG Meeting: 1 December 2009

ISSUES

1. Attached for information at Appendix 1, is the discussion paper presented by James Brown (CONFOR) at the above meeting.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. Members are invited to comment on the paper directly to James Brown cc to Alan Plom.

**HSE Agriculture & Food Sector
December 2009**

APPENDIX 1

Current Demographics of the Tree-Work Industry - November 2009

It is important that we consider frequently the factors affecting employment in our industry.

Failure to do so will cause either shortages of labour resulting in work not being done; conversely a surfeit of labour will induce lower financial reward, injudicious risk taking and a labour vacuum caused by a part of a generation migrating to other jobs.

Recent lack of economic viability elsewhere removed trained forestry labour, accelerated by the clumsy implementation of the Gangmasters Licensing Act without the normal impact assessment. In conjunction with the Forestry Contracting Association a survey of labour remaining showed that many were on the brink of insolvency and it took very little to motivate experienced people to leave tree work for more lucrative, less stressful and more pleasant work.

We found that 35% of the remaining workforce was over 50 years of age, 30% had left in the preceding year and that the remaining 35% were experiencing financial hardship. Certain employers took heed of this information and made sure that the economic scale was tilted more equably.

Since then we have experienced a national economic crisis, imports of timber down by 50% partly due to reduction in house sales and consequent lack of demand for new houses, balanced by an increased use of about 5% of UK grown timber.

Sawmills are busy; but it is difficult to justify the sense of so much home grown timber going to wood fuel and it certainly can't be said that using such quality wood in this way represents best use. (For best use timber should be used for its primary purpose before being used as a fuel). There might be a shortage of home grown timber in the next few years but this will not be helped by the planned ever increasing tariffs set by Russia for timber leaving Eastern Europe, currently at \$50 per cubic metre.

In Britain's normal winter weather there will be disruption to wood supply but although harvesting crews are working hard, payments per cubic metre remain insufficient for planning replacement machinery. Thus machinery owners are reluctant and unable to replace machines which are barely running at a profit. There remains a shortage of machine operators and the construction of some contracts gives cause for concern.

The high prices of firewood in some areas have distorted the financial picture, but the sting in the tail is the lack of a reliable supply in the short and longer term.

In the vicinity of towns and cities those involved in arboriculture are experiencing work hard to find, with regular contracts, if won, set at very low rates due to intense competition. Indeed many potential clients, including local authorities, are ignoring all but essential or safety related work. Many firms have reduced staff already and are working to reduced capacity. Accreditation processes for competing firms have been elongated, resulting in more paper preparation for less actual work.

It is against this backdrop that we must carry out our programme of work in The AFAG Committee. All is not lost. We must persuade our remaining colleagues to use downtime to fulfil training objectives hitherto precluded by pressure of work and to take advantage of whatever other opportunities in education are available in their local area.

There has never been a better time to consider operating procedures and to ensure staff are fully acquainted with them.

James Brown

30th November, 2009

Annex 1

AFAG Project B9 – Small scale self-propelled machinery in forestry

Background	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Small scale self propelled machinery, such as Alpine tractors, are increasingly used for forestry applications. Many units are available with 4-wheel drive and articulated axles, and offer power-assisted steering. The operator platforms are usually more comfortable and ergonomic than those of other small-scale machines, with a flat deck free of obstructions enabling the driver to easily get on and off the machine. 2. Compared to larger machines, the small size of alpine tractors enables better manoeuvrability and can provide better access e.g. among standing trees. Their proportionally low weight and large footprint area (the area of the machine in contact with the ground), makes them more suitable for operations on sensitive sites. They also require lower access track specifications. 3. In financial terms, these machines represent a relatively lower investment compared to the price of larger machines. They are easy to move from one place to another and are not restricted to specialised tasks and can be used with a variety of attachments, making them very versatile machines. Most of them are fitted with a standard three point linkage and PTO drive 4. However, these machines do not offer the standard of operator protection normally associated with mobile, self-propelled forestry machinery. They are not fitted with a protective cab as standard and therefore the operator is at risk from falling and protruding objects. Furthermore, initial examination of these machines suggests that the ROPs fitted would not comply with current regulations. 5. Despite their increasing use, there is currently no guidance available on the use of these machines in forestry. Therefore, it is essential that good practice guidance is developed to inform Risk Assessments relating to their use and to identify acceptable levels of operator protection. In addition, it is essential to ensure that the basic level of operator protection provided as part of the machine is fit for purpose and complies with UK legislation.
Objectives:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Review the range of machines currently available in the UK; 7. Confirm that their integral protective structures are fit for purpose and comply with the legislation; 8. Work with suppliers and manufacturers to ensure that any issues identified are addressed; 9. Develop guidance for the industry on the suitable risk assessment process that should be applied to the use of these machines and provide good practice guidance on their safe use; 10. Promote guidance and communicate risk management and project messages

	directly through the Forestry Commission, industry associations and exhibitions/demonstration events, as well as via specialist trade publications.	
Resources:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group to consist of AFAG members, co-opted members from industry and staff from HSE (Ag Sector) and the Forest Enterprise Technical Development Branch, as required; • Research needs and sources of funding to be identified; • Cost of production and publishing guidance from Communications budget – to be determined. • Input from the industry to be gathered throughout the project via the AFAG Public Community Website. 	
Milestones:	TBC	
Output:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notes of meetings circulated to all AFAG members; • Dissemination of all results to members and industry; • Production of AFAG Safety Guide or Forestry Commission Technical Development Branch Note, to be made available via the HSE/Treework website; • Identification of key communication messages, communication approaches and target audiences for future articles, etc (to be determined). Information used for development of articles in trade journals, etc and dedicated page on HSE/Treework website. Dissemination of results to the relevant organisations; • Communication plan developed and initiated at the start of the project which aims to bring about cultural change; 	
Members of Working Group	TBC	

AFAG Project B10 - Felling of Large Trees

Background	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The industry have called on AFAG to consider its current guidance in relation to the felling of large trees. Current AFAG guidance contained in AFAG 307 Chainsaw Felling of Large Trees states that chainsaw operators should <i>ensure that no other person is within a distance equal to twice the height of the tree to be felled</i>. However, many in the industry consider that, for certain large trees, it is safer to allow two persons to work at the tree stump – the chainsaw operator and a colleague to apply wedges into the cut. 2. This is on the basis that risk assessments and resulting method statements indicate that two persons working at the base of the tree reduce the practical difficulties for one person felling large trees. This system of work also reduces the effect of exhaustion throughout a working day. These hazards are not properly addressed by the current AFAG guidance.
Objectives:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Review the current guidance in relation to the felling of large trees; 4. Examine the risks associated with the current good practice guidance and those associated with having two people work at the base of the tree; 5. Examine risk assessments / method statements submitted for consideration by the project group 6. Make recommendations to AFAG on whether the current guidance should or should not be changed and, in the case of the former, to develop new good practice guidance for this type of felling. 7. Promote guidance and communicate risk management and project messages directly through the Forestry Commission, industry associations and exhibitions/demonstration events, as well as via specialist trade publications.
Resources:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group to consist of AFAG members, co-opted members from industry and staff from HSE (Ag Sector) and the Forest Enterprise Technical Development Branch, as required; • Research needs and sources of funding to be identified; • Cost of production and publishing guidance from Communications budget – to be determined. • Input from the industry gathered throughout the project via the AFAG Public Community Website
Milestones:	TBC
Output:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notes of meetings circulated to all AFAG members; • Dissemination of all results to members and industry; • Possible revision of AFAG Safety Guide 307. • Identification of key communication messages, communication approaches and target audiences for future articles, etc (to be determined). Information used for development of articles in trade journals, etc. Dissemination of results to the relevant organisations and made available via the HSE/Treework website ;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communication plan developed and initiated at the start of the project which aims to bring about cultural change.	
Members of Working Group	TBC	

AFAG Project Group B11 - Extraction by Cable Crane

<p>Background</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cable crane extraction is a method of extracting timber over rough and/or steep ground using a system of pulleys and line wires. The tractor, which provides the power for the system, remains on the forest road. Although there are relatively few forestry contractors who carry out this type of work in GB, it has been reported that the numbers are increasing. 2. The current AFAG leaflet 504 <i>Extraction by Cable Crane</i> provides long-standing good practice guidance to the industry. This was reviewed by AFAG in 2002 and a revised leaflet published in 2003. The guidance refers mainly to cable crane systems that were used traditionally in GB. However, there have been a number of advances in cable crane technology over the recent past and AFAG members have identified the need to review this system of extraction to identify any need to supplement or revise current AFAG guidance. 3. Hand signals are used during forestry cable crane operations in situations where communication via radio is not possible. The traditional system of hand signals is described in AFAG 504 <i>Extraction by Cable Crane</i> differs from the signals used for winching operations in other industries (such as the use of cranes in construction) which conform to the current British Standard <u>BS7121</u>. 4. Importantly, the signals for emergency stop in the British Standard (two hands held above the head) is the signal described in AFAG 504 (and currently used by cable crane operators) for ‘haul in’. Representation has been made to AFAG to consider whether the hand signals used in forestry should be changed to harmonise with those detailed in the British Standard.
<p>Objectives:</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Review the issue of hand signals in cable crane operations and make recommendations as to whether these should be harmonised with the current British Standard; 6. Review the range of types of cable crane operations used currently in GB and, in light of this information, evaluate whether current AFAG guidance is fit for purpose. 7. Work with suppliers and manufacturers to ensure that any issues identified are addressed; 8. If necessary, develop guidance for the industry on the suitable risk assessment process that should be applied cable crane operations and provide good practice guidance on safe use; 9. Promote guidance and communicate risk management and project messages directly through the Forestry Commission, industry associations and exhibitions/demonstration events, as well as via specialist trade publications.

Resources:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group to consist of AFAG members, co-opted members from industry and staff from HSE (Ag Sector) and the Forest Enterprise Technical Development Branch, as required; • Research needs and sources of funding to be identified; • Cost of production and publishing guidance from Communications budget – to be determined; • Input from the industry gathered throughout the project via the AFAG Public Community Website. 	
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Members of Working Group	TBC	