

AFAG 09/08

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HEALTH AND SAFETY EXECUTIVE

ARBORICULTURE AND FORESTRY ADVISORY GROUP

Continuous Professional Development – 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

Continuous Professional Development – Tree Work Industry

Much has been said about people working in the industry maintaining and updating professional skills. Employers have a responsibility to do this which suggests that the self-employed if they require work, must arrange this themselves. Many in the tree work industry are self employed and simply can't afford to spend much time on expensive courses.

We must remember that the employment base has changed and bears little resemblance to the 1980s and 1990s. There are fewer people working on the ground with chainsaws, that work in many cases being undertaken now by harvesters and forwarders. There is even less distinction between work carried out by "arborists" and "foresters" as economic necessity has removed any barriers there may have been.

Official statistics tell us that there are fewer people "at work" in our industry, bearing in mind that others are "counted" under other, parallel industries. For example chain saws are used in horticulture, fencing, agriculture, local authorities, armed forces and power and water suppliers, to mention just a few. Unfortunately tree work is also carried out by less reputable individuals who can purchase or steal chainsaws, operating with apparent impunity but taking work from bona-fide chainsaw users. There are particular pressures at present with the paucity of work in many areas with such work as there is being offered at rock bottom prices.

Against this background we must evolve a simple continuous professional development system otherwise it just won't work. It mustn't be complicated or be hijacked by any organisation. A similar system works well in the food industry – also under the same management in HSE –and relies on the individual keeping a written log of experience in a jotter or notebook. This enables the individual to show a potential employer what he has done at work, where he did it and why it was out of the ordinary and if possible a countersignature from the person allocating or supervising the work at the time. It is hoped, and indeed expected, that the individual will be readily able to show proof of such qualifications as demonstrate competency.

An obvious means of keeping up to date is the attendance at SHADS or other meetings. With this in mind it is suggested that a record of attendance should be available at SHADS, provided the attendee produces an up to date photograph at the time.

There are interesting possibilities for other simple ways of updating and if the meeting agrees, these will continue to be explored.