Notes

Further reading

Emergency planning	AFAG802
Electricity at work: Forestry and arboriculture	AFAG804
Training and certification	AFAG805
First aid at work: Your questions answered	INDG214
Managing health and safety in forestry	INDG294

These publications are available from HSE Books - see 'Further information'.

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Further information

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This leaflet contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.

This leaflet is available in priced packs of 15 from HSE Books, ISBN 978 0 7176 2631 1. Single free copies are also available from HSE Books.

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Hand tool weeding, brashing and pruning

AFAG
Arboriculture and Forestry Advisory Group

Introduction

This leaflet covers the use of hand tools for weeding, brashing and pruning in forestry and other tree work.

You can use this leaflet as part of the risk assessment process to help identify the controls to put in place when using hand tools.

You must also assess the effect of the site and the weather as well as following this guidance.

All operators must have had appropriate training in how to carry out the tasks required (see AFAG leaflet 805 *Training and certification*).

Personal protective equipment (PPE)

❑ **1** Use the following PPE:

- A safety helmet, complying with EN 397 (to be worn when the risk assessment shows a need for one).
- Suitable protective gloves when handling tools and for protection from thorns, brambles and harmful weeds.
- Non-snag outer clothing appropriate to the prevailing weather conditions. The use of high-visibility clothing, complying with EN 471, may also be appropriate.
- Safety boots with good grip and ankle support, complying with BS EN 20345.
- Eye protection (a mesh visor complying with EN 1731 or safety glasses to EN 166) should be worn when the risk assessment shows it is needed, eg when working in tall woody vegetation.

❑ **2** Use blade protection for transporting cutting tools.

❑ **3** Carry a personal first-aid kit (see HSE leaflet INDG214 *First aid at work: Your questions answered*).

Preparing for work

❑ **4** Ensure a risk assessment has been undertaken and the significant findings recorded. All workers involved in any operation on the worksite should be made aware of and comply with the controls identified.

❑ **5** A safe method of operation for the work to be done must be agreed to ensure a safe working distance can be maintained between workers and between workers and any machinery (out of the risk zones of the tools or machinery being used).

❑ **6** Do not carry out high pruning work if any part of the equipment or tree can come within 15 m of an energised overhead power line. Where pruning is within two tree lengths of an overhead power line, obtain further advice from the owner of the line (see AFAG leaflet 804 *Electricity at work: Forestry and arboriculture*).

❑ **7** Make sure a designated and responsible person knows the daily work programme and agree with them a suitable emergency procedure. Where reasonably practicable, use a two-way radio or mobile phone and a pre-arranged call-in system.

❑ **8** Make sure the emergency services can be provided with enough detail to enable them to access the worksite in the event of an accident, eg the grid reference, distance from the main road, type of access (suitable for car/four-wheel drive/emergency service vehicles). Know the location details before they are needed in an emergency. (Also see AFAG leaflet 802 *Emergency planning*.)

General maintenance

❑ **9** Ensure maintenance, setting and sharpening is carried out as specified in the manufacturer's handbook.

❑ **10** Clean blades periodically throughout the day. Ensure blades are not loose and check for missing and badly damaged teeth, cracks, setting and sharpness.

❑ **11** When sharpening, hold the cutting tool firmly and in a safe position. Ensure fingers and other parts of the hand are kept well clear of the cutting edge.

❑ **12** Check the handle (and extensions) for cracks and splinters.

❑ **13** Report any defects to the supervisor or contract manager.

❑ **14** Cover or remove the blade when tools are being transported, stored or are not in use.

Use of weeding and cleaning tools

❑ **15** Make sure a firm stance is maintained and there is enough clear, unimpeded space to swing the cutting tool safely.

❑ **16** Do not swing the cutting tool directly towards the legs.

❑ **17** When using a short-handled hook, keep your free hand well away from the cutting direction. A forked stick may be used to keep the free hand away from the cutting tool.

Use of hand saws for brashing and pruning

❑ **18** Make sure you maintain a firm stance and there is enough clear, unimpeded space to use the saw safely.

❑ **19** Be alert to hazards such as wasps' nests.

❑ **20** Take extra care when working on broken ground, near drains etc.

❑ **21** Do not stand astride the saw handle.

❑ **22** Stand so you are clear of falling branches when pruning.

❑ **23** Keep ditches clear of brash.

Notes