

Safety Bulletin - February 2018

FATALITY

The coroner has advised of the death of a tree surgeon on 23rd November 2016 and issued a 'Report to prevent further deaths' under Regulation 28 of the Coroners (Investigations) Regulations 2013.

The deceased was an experienced tree surgeon. Whilst carrying out work the tree surgeon fell approximately 50ft from a conifer tree. The tree surgeon's life line and flip line were not attached in correct positions, resulting in him being pulled from the tree.

The coroner's matters of concern are –

1. There were two tree surgeons climbing with one groundsman between them. The ratio of 2:1 meant that the tree surgeons did not have someone supporting them and available at all times.
2. The groundsman supporting the tree surgeons was not qualified for aerial work. This meant that should the tree surgeon have required assistance whilst in the trees the groundsman could not have gone to their help.
3. Communication between the groundsman and tree surgeons was via shouting and hand signals. This was difficult given the density of the trees being cut and the height that tree surgeons were working at.

The Arboricultural Association would like to draw attention to the content of the following key industry good practice guides:

AFAG 401 Tree Climbing Operations

Under 'General', page 2

- A minimum of two people should be present during all tree-climbing operations. One of the team must be available on the ground, competent and equipped to perform an aerial rescue immediately (see leaflet AFAG402 Aerial tree rescue).
- A competent and responsible person should know the daily work programme and agree a suitable emergency procedure with personnel on site. All people involved with site works should be able to communicate with each other.
- In some work environments, e.g. noisy and/or scattered sites, special measures may be necessary to ensure good quality communication, e.g. two-way radios.

Under 'Responsibilities of the ground staff', page 9

- Plan the job with the climber(s) before the work starts and be aware of the task(s) involved. On busy sites consider dedicating a specific member of the ground staff to each climber.
- Maintain effective communication with climbers at all times.
- Maintain concentration and watch the climbers. Anticipate their needs, passing up tools and other equipment when required.
- Continually assess the operation and modify the work plan and risk assessment as necessary. If at any stage you are unsure, stop the work in progress and re-assess the operation.

A Guide to Good Climbing Practice

Under 'Ground staff', page 38

Ground staff play an important role in tree climbing operations. A good grounds person will make the climber's job easier and safer and can improve efficiency of the task by the following actions:

- Plan the job with the climber before work starts and be aware of the tasks involved.
- Maintain effective communication with the climber(s).
- Maintain concentration and watch the climber(s). Anticipate their needs, passing up tools and other equipment.
- Provide an extra pair of eyes for the climber and advise where appropriate on the correct route of ascent, work position and anchor point selection.

The Industry Code of Practice for Arboriculture - Tree Work at Height

This document makes specific references to the management and supervision of tree work at height, including:

- Planning and resourcing
- Roles and responsibilities
- Communication
- Operator proficiency
- Auditing and inspection
- Rescue planning

Please ensure you and your colleagues are aware of these guidance documents and their contents, and that adequate planning, training, supervision and resources are implemented to prevent further tragic injury/ loss of life.

Our thoughts and condolences go to the family and friends of the deceased.