



FEATURE 4, DECEMBER 2005

AA Utility Arboriculture Group Quarterly Update

1. Going Live with Utility Arboriculture

Article by Paul Hornby, AUS Limited

The 39th National Arboriculture Conference – University of Exeter, September 2005

This year's conference was hailed by all delegates as the biggest and most so successful so far. A full Utility Arboriculture programme involving conference sessions and outdoor events was run as part of the main conference.

Lecture Sessions

The Utility Arboriculture Group was pleased to present the first session which was an introduction to its aims and objectives, Pete Jackson of Tilhill was the speaker. The other speakers over Monday and Tuesday were John Fuller of Protree, Ian Mobbs and Martyn Wordsworth of WPD, Richard Peberdey of Tilhill and Simon Richmond of Lantra Awards. Martin Lennon of Fountains was the very able MC over the 2 days keeping the speakers in line and on time.

Outdoor Events

This years outdoor programme consisted of two events both being run at the same time and beside each other:

AUS Utility Skills Competition

This was the 6th year that this event had been held and 10 teams each completed 3 events – Rod Skills, Work Climb & Aerial Rescue.

The weather got better over the day and the audience was bigger than ever. Several teams were competing for the first time and a special mention must be made of new entrant Dartmoor Tree Surgeons whose team narrowly missed 3rd place overall. The standard was even higher than last year and the eventual winners were pushed very hard by the rest of the field. The eventual winners were **fountains** Support Services for a straight third year running.

Tilhill safety Challenge

An innovation this year was the introduction of the Tilhill Safety Challenge which saw 20 competitors drawn from across the industry, each trying to spot the deliberate safety mistakes on 3 different staged work sites. The object was to highlight the complex and difficult conditions in which today's contractors strive to maintain the highest safety standards.

Not all competitors saw all the deliberate mistakes and the eventual winner of a cheque for £500.00 was Steve Hedges of Greenwich Borough Council.

All in all a very successful conference from a Utility Arb point of view, we look forward to seeing all you Utility Arborists at next years event at the University of York, 2nd - 4th October 2006.

3. The Electricity Safety, Quality and Continuity (Amendment) Regulations 2005 (ESQCR)

By Peter Neighbour, fountains plc

In the Newsletter 128 (March 2005) we reported that the Department of Trade and Industry was consulting stakeholders on electrical network resilience in relation to trees. After consultation and feedback from the Virtual Group the UAG submitted its response to the DTI on 5 September. In summary it recommended the following:

1. Legislation is required to ensure that long term focus is maintained and to ensure full participation.
2. A new code of practice is also required but that this will only be effective if DNO compliance is actively and independently monitored.
3. It is vital that all interested stakeholders are involved in drawing up a new code of practice; this is not a matter for the electricity industry on its own.
4. The UAG offer to take a central role alongside the Energy Networks Association to either increase the scope of "ENATS 43-8 Overhead Line Clearances" to include maintaining trees clear of overhead lines for reasons of supply reliability or to develop a new code of practice to achieve this.
5. The traditional 5 year cutting cycle is too long, 3 years is now regarded as best practice.
6. Current arrangements have resulted in a wide variation in the standards being applied by electricity companies in terms of safe working practice, tree care and training. The UAG consider the current position unsatisfactory and want to ensure that the proposals lead to increased standardisation.
7. A risk assessed approach should be adopted to ensure that trees at high risk of storm damage are removed while those at low risk can be retained.
8. Greater emphasis on tree survey and electronic data capture are required for an effective risk assessed approach.
9. The UAG believe that much of current DNO procurement practice for the engagement of utility arborists is counter productive to achieving the objectives of this amendment. Lowest cost rather than best value and/or short rather than long term contracts dissuades investment in training and has made the utility sector the least attractive in terms of career for arborists and managers. This must be addressed.
10. A national campaign to raise public awareness of the rationale for vegetation management would greatly assist the process for negotiating clearances with owners of trees.
11. The UAG believe that it is in the public interest for DNOs to show their determination to invoke their statutory powers when landowners unreasonably withhold their permission to allow vegetation management programmes to proceed.
12. The timescale for implementation of the proposed legislation should be clarified.

We now await the results from the DTI and will update in due course. In the meantime please visit the UAG section of the AA website for a full copy of the UAG response.

13. Sector Skills Council Study

By Nick Eden, Arboricultural Association

In UAG Feature 3 (September 2005) we reported that the Sector Skills Council for Utilities (Energy and Utility Skills SSC) was conducting a study on the current provision of NPTC qualifications for Utility Arboriculture. The study was being conducted on behalf of the Energy Networks Association and was submitted to them in August but has only recently become available for public consumption. The SSC are keen to involve key stakeholders and the UAG will keep the progress of this report under close review as it sees the report as one of several keys to achieving its core objectives.

One major contention raised by more than one Virtual Group member was the “on hold” position of the reassessment of NPTC UA qualifications. Related issues were:

- The certificate card does not show an expiry date

- NPTC are reviewing the units

- Whether or not refresher training would be required as part of the reassessment process

- If so, could refresher training incorporate an integrated assessment?

NPTC feel that there is a lack of consensus and as a result it has asked for the UAG's view. The chairman is consulting Virtual Group members and will subsequently present the UAG's view to NPTC.

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