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AA Utility Arboriculture Group Quarterly Update

By Steve Hewitt NPTC & Paul Hornby, AUS

In recent months the energies of the UAG Core Group have been focused on the NPTC recertification issue. As reported in the last issue of the Arboricultural Association Newsletter (Issue 135 December 2006) the NPTC Certificate of Competence in Utility Arboriculture recertification was to be addressed in the short term by an on-site audit of the candidate's skills where an NPTC assessor/auditor(s) will visit the candidate whilst they are working on a real site as part of their day to day work. The objective of this is to sample the skills relevant to this qualification in units 1 and 2 to establish that the operator is still applying these skills at the same standard (or higher) than when they were originally assessed.

Steve Hewitt of NPTC has been elected as a member of the Core Group and with this new found co-operation with NPTC the process has really taken off and recertification is now available (as from 1 February 2007).

Recertification Procedure

Prior to the on-site audit

Candidates or their employers will complete a "Statement of Competency" which details the units they hold and the work they have been undertaking in the last three years. There is also a declaration from a network operator, or a copy of their certificate of authorisation attached to confirm their authorisation is still current. This is submitted to the NPTC assessment centre.

Candidates will then be asked to undertake two multiple choice question papers prior to the audit – one on electrical safety and one on arboriculture relevant to utility work. (Candidates who only hold Unit 1 will only be required to undertake the electrical safety paper). These exams will be conducted by the NPTC assessment centre in examination conditions at a mutually convenient venue. Where candidates have difficulties with reading and writing, there are standard procedures for enabling equal opportunity of access to these candidates. Details of this can be obtained from NPTC or the NPTC assessment centre.

Question papers will then be marked externally by NPTC. Following satisfactory results the on site audit can then take place with the agreement of the employer (and Network Operator if appropriate). In the event that a candidate is unsuccessful in these exams he/she and his/her employer will be advised and they will be invited to resubmit themselves for the relevant exam(s) again, following any further training thought necessary.

On-Site Audit

The site must have tree work being carried out in proximity to an overhead line. It must contain trees that are being pruned using live line techniques and/or felled. Where candidates are to be audited for Aerial Operations then an energised line is not essential.

On arrival the NPTC will be expected to review and sign onto the on site Risk Assessment. Where practicable they will be present at the team briefing. If not they must be briefed by the team leader and sign on to the document. In the absence of a Risk Assessment or if it is inadequate then they will not proceed with the audit and the assessor/auditor(s) will notify the team leader and employer of their decision.

Audits must not be carried out on sites where the added presence of assessor/auditor(s) will create dangers to themselves, team members or other site users. In the event that the site or operations on the site are deemed to be dangerous then all audits will cease.

Assessor/auditor(s) will not instruct candidates to carry out work other than that which was previously agreed with the Network Operator, landowner and employer.

The assessor/auditor(s) will choose the activity to be observed for the candidate to demonstrate competence by carrying out the work practically and advise the candidate of the decision. This will be work that is already programmed for the site. For all other criteria detailed on the on-site audit sheet, and for criteria not shown during the practical demonstration, the assessor/auditor(s) will ensure the candidate's continuing competence by verbal questioning. The assessor/auditor(s) will give the candidate feedback on their performance and complete the "Observation Sheet" before submitting this to NPTC so that a certificate can be issued.

Where a candidate is unsuccessful he/she will be informed as will their employer. All candidates can resubmit for the on-site audit a second time if unsuccessful on the first occasion. However, if unsuccessful on the second attempt they would then have to retake the full qualification.

Editor's note: the availability of recertification has been a concern for all in Utility Arboriculture for several years. The AA is grateful to all in the UAG Core Group and others who have now made this possible.

Arboricultural Association
Ampfield House
Ampfield
Romsey
Hants SO51 9PA.
United Kingdom

Tel +44 (0) 1794 368717
Fax +44 (0) 1794 368978
Email admin@trees.org.uk
Web www.trees.org.uk