

Two-rope working – an update

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Following the announcement in the last issue of the ARB Magazine (issue 186, page 7) that the HSE is now requiring full compliance with the Work at Height Regulations in relation to tree climbing operations, there has been much discussion and debate.

The relevant section of the Regulations is Schedule 5, which addresses requirements for personal fall protection systems. See www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2005/735/schedule/5. The HSE has observed that some aspects of these requirements have been largely ignored by many climbing arborists, and that current training and assessment standards do not adequately address these issues.

The HSE has provided details of reported fall from height accidents for a one-year period, which can be viewed on the AA's website: www.trees.org.uk/2ropes-incidents. The background to this wider issue can be viewed here: www.trees.org.uk/2ropes.

The Association has been in discussion with many other organisations, businesses and individuals over the past few months to ensure that, as a sector, we are taking a proportionate and practical position in response to this development in HSE policy.

One of the most urgent concerns of many people is that HSE is reminding us that as these Regulations are current (and have been in force since 2005), all operators should be compliant immediately. While the HSE does not intend to focus particularly on our industry in terms of its inspectors' activity, it has stated that in any investigation following an incident involving tree climbing, it would expect employers and the self-employed to be compliant with the Regulations.

This creates a period of insecurity for our sector, as we do not yet have detailed industry guidance in place to help practitioners accurately interpret the requirements in order to be compliant and to make informed practical decisions in planning and carrying out their daily work.

Working with our colleagues and other stakeholders we have developed a timetable for introducing the required guidance.

Implementing changes to tree climbing guidance: use of two climbing lines

Objective	Completed by
1 Devise and agree basic, principal guidelines for climbing using two lines – to be disseminated to training instructors and the wider industry.	November 2019
2 Revise and update the <i>Industry Code of Practice for Arboriculture – Tree Work at Height (ICoP)</i> – Principal guidelines for the 'Responsible person' and 'Competent person'	January 2020
3 Revise existing draft of the forthcoming AA Technical Guide: <i>Tree Climbing and Aerial Rescue (TG1)</i> – Including detailed, practical guidance on the implementation of the use of two lines.	March 2020
4 Integration of TG1 guidance into national training content	spring 2020
5 Integration of TG1 guidance into national assessment standards.	spring 2020

The work on revision of the ICoP is progressing well and the HSE has agreed that the following hierarchical approach should form the basis of planning tree climbing work at height:

Hierarchy of approach for use of two lines

1. Two personal fall protection systems installed over independent load-bearing anchors must be the preferred method of working at all times.

2. If point 1 is not achievable then two fall protection systems should be installed over a single load-bearing anchor point.

3. If, as a result of a risk assessment, it is determined that it is not reasonably practicable, or would entail higher risk to persons,* to achieve points 1 or 2, then one system installed over one load-bearing anchor may be used.

NB. If point 3 is to be adopted, all measures must be taken to ensure that the anchor point and personal fall protection system cannot fail.

* Depending on the system employed. **Note:** An operator adopting point 3 on the principle of 'reasonably practicable' must be able to show that the effort or resource to adopt point 1 or 2 would be **grossly disproportionate** to the benefits of risk reduction that would be achieved. Thus, the decision-making process is not one of simply balancing the costs and benefits of measures but, rather, of always adopting the measures except where they are ruled out because they involve **grossly disproportionate sacrifices**.



These principles will apply to all tree climbing operations and offer a planned approach, subject to any detailed decision making if points 1 or 2 are not possible. It is anticipated that situations where the use of a single fall protection system is compliant will be rare and of short duration. At this stage the emphasis is on all fall protection systems, regardless of whether they incorporate doubled/moving rope technique (MRT) or stationary rope technique (SRT) or a combination of the two.

Basic practical guidance

At a recent meeting of Lantra Awards Aerial Tree Work Verifiers, a basic set of practical guidance was agreed which has been disseminated to registered instructors to provide initial direction for training that is being delivered currently. There will be further workshop sessions for instructors, but it is recognised that until the full and comprehensive guidance is published in the forthcoming AA Technical Guide, there remains a gap in detailed provision.

Access

1. Rope Advance System

- Have 3 viable systems prior to leaving the ground (2 climbing lines, 1 lanyard). Install systems 1 & 2 (2 climbing lines) from ground. Test each system. Ascend to first anchor.
- Maintain 2 climbing systems at all times
- Repeat to final anchor point.

2. Throw Line

- Install 2 separate climbing systems and if possible do so on independent anchors. Test systems independently. Ascend.

Working in the tree

- Select 2 separate load-bearing anchors where possible and install 2 separate climbing systems. Test systems independently.
- Work using 2 independent climbing systems.

Descent

Both primary and secondary working systems should be long enough to descend to the ground.

Rescue

A single line system may be acceptable in a rescue situation.



Frequently asked questions

We have been fielding queries on this topic for a few weeks now and we will host an FAQs section on the Association’s website to provide answers – here are some examples of the most common questions:

Question	Answer
1 What happens in aerial rescue situations when 2-rope makes rescue more difficult?	It is acceptable to resort to a single personal fall protection system to carry out an aerial rescue.
2 Will there be a list of scenarios where 2-rope exemptions could apply, e.g. if you are able to rule it out categorically in risk assessment?	This will be clarified in the Technical Guide.
3 To what extent will contractors be held accountable in the period until training and full detailed guidance have been made available?	HSE has stated that the Regulations apply now, and therefore employers and the self-employed should be complying with them.
4 What face-to-face training and other resources will be available?	Training and update workshops will be planned for delivery from spring 2020.
5 Will a draft of the updated guidance be made available to have a look at prior to it being finalised?	Yes, an industry consultation on the Technical Guide will be held once the draft is ready.

Stonehouse tree walk

One of the charitable aims of the Association is to promote arboriculture to the general public and raise political awareness of trees and tree professionals, and our recent participation in a local event contributed towards this ambition.

In September 2019 the first Stonehouse (Gloucestershire) walking festival took place, organised entirely by volunteers and supported by the town council, featuring free guided walks around the area for all ages and abilities. AA Senior Technical Officer John Parker (full declaration – also a Stonehouse town councillor) led two tree walks around Stonehouse town centre and nearby Doverow Woods. The purpose of the walks was to raise awareness of trees, the benefits of trees and the roles of professional arboriculturists.

More than 350 people participated in the walking festival in total and over 40 attended the two tree walks, including Stroud MP David Drew and a number of local councillors. The Association is proud to have its home in Stonehouse and we are keen to continue to build relationships and engage with the thriving local community of which we are a part.



A tree walk group in front of an ancient oak in Stonehouse.