



Safe forestry

Toby Allen

(Say it with Wood) introduces the Chainsaw Competences System, developed by Calum Duffy.

Chainsaw work has changed since I started out. Machines are more capable, and because it's more efficient (and safe) to use mechanical assistance where possible, chainsaw work has been pushed to the margins. Anything a machine is incapable of cutting is the job of the handcutter. This can be steep slopes, big timber, valu-

able hardwoods, coppice, felling trees for the harvester to reach or presenting for the winch and so on. There is a shortage of labour in the industry, especially the awesome type with the skills to tackle these jobs. It is the landowner's or employer's responsibility to ensure the chaps on the hill are trained and competent for the work you are asking them to do, and the choice of operator has to be based on ability rather than price. Chainsaw tickets (nptc, lantra) have been the standard for a while, getting the training refreshed every three or five years, depending on how often they use the saw. While this is a really useful system, it fails to demonstrate the experience or skills of the peo-

ple we employ. Someone fresh out of a five-day course, arb guys, and occasional users are in the same class as professional forest workers. We need a way to separate out the awesome.

This was a problem posed by HSE to Calum Duffy (duffyskylining.co.uk) during a site visit. If there was an incident how could he show to investigators that the chainsaw

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operator was an appropriate choice for the task? Recording time spent on the saw, any training given and the time consolidating those skills seemed a logical step. As Calum explains, "The Chainsaw Competency System was created to answer a challenge from the HSE on how to prove the competence of chainsaw operators on site by not just certification, if the system is implemented and followed it answers a question that was previously very difficult to do so. It quantifies the skill level of the operator and provides a professionalism to this highly skilled occupation." As an active member of the Forestry Contracting Association, and member of the FISA Chainsaw Working Group, Calum and Stephen Hailes from H&W training brought others round to the idea. At the same time, they invested in developing a mobile app, Safe Forestry, to help with the practical management of risk on site, which also has the function to record skills and experience as part of a daily routine.

In my opinion there is a need for this system. It provides a framework for improvement, and a path to follow after completing the chainsaw ticket.

How does the competence system work?

The journey starts as a 'basic operator', as more training and skills are gained, the next level 'chainsaw technician' is achieved. With further training and working in more complex operations, operators can be further recognised as a 'specialist and leader'. At this level it is expected they will pass on their skills and help audit people on the way up.

Experienced chainsaw technicians will be able to enter the system at an equivalent to their current experience. Trainees would still take the existing initial training and certification route. Users of the system can either progress through the competency system; or remain established at a set competency dependant on their own requirements/work. The Chainsaw Competency System will gradually supersede the Chainsaw Refresher - so you would not need to do both."

Continuous career development (CPD) is built into the system, and people are expected to attend CPD events as part of their journey. These will be on topics such as felling on steep banks, cutting diseased ash, and using felling aids amongst other subjects. Forestry is a varied industry, and the outline on the FISA website can be used to create a system suitable for your business. To get started it's a simple case of carrying out a skills audit, which level would you and your staff fall into? Where are the gaps in the knowledge and how to fill them? If there isn't someone in the business with the skills to carry out an audit, you can request an external auditor to do so. Logging hours/experience can be done in a few ways, the SAFE FORESTRY app is a purpose-built tool to make the process easy, but alternatives are apps such as MYSAFETY, or it can be done on paper, while skinflints like me have been experimenting using social media such as Whatsapp to communicate with the forestry team at the same time recording what they are doing.

Is the system used industry-wide?

The FCA, FISA and HSE are backing the system and FISA are currently hosting the system for Safe Forestry. Gillian Clark, CEO of FISA describes how it works: "Traditionally,

chainsaw technician competence was mainly judged on a training ticket; the proposed chainsaw competency system offers a clear way to support the competence (and experience) of a technician and to demonstrate their ability to undertake particular types of chainsaw work.

Safe Forestry and the FISA Chainsaw Working Group drew up the Outline Chainsaw Competency System which is available on the FISA website. Successful pilots of the system are being run by Safe Forestry; considerable development will be required before the system can be rolled out industry-wide, we expect this development to take at least 18 months. FISA will of course keep you informed as this development progresses.

Why we need this system

The beauty of the Chainsaw Competency is that it is voluntary and seen as an aspiration for those wanting to stand out as professional handcutters working to be at the top of their game. The system is designed by chainsaw users for the benefit of chainsaw users. I feel this system has the potential to make a real difference to the safety of those working on the ground by raising the status of the handcutting trade. A site visit by a high level-technician will help landowners understand which are the complex tasks needing very experienced operators and which can be done by less experienced guys. I'll finish with an extract from a message I received from a chap starting a forest career. He recently finished his small tree felling course and is gradually building up a portfolio of experience. "I'm up to 83 hours now and I do feel there is an improvement. Today I helped with crown breakdown, clearing small birch and chomping down brush. With some coaching I'm more proficient at tension and compression cuts, just got to remember sideways tension! There's still a way to go and I can see why 500 hours is a suggested milestone". Awesome!

For more information with updates and app release details please contact Safe Forestry LTD on info@safeforestry.co.uk



For more information on the Chainsaw Competency System please email info@safeforestry.co.uk or the website is safeforestry.co.uk