



Should we Inspect All of our Trees or Assess None of Them?

At 'The Future of Tree Risk Management' seminar held in London in September 2006, speakers picked up on the fact that with few deaths resulting from tree failure in the United Kingdom, the risk of death is very low being in the region of 1 in 10 million per annum. At first glance we might be led to the conclusion that if the risk is so low there is not much point in managing trees to reduce it even further. The reality of the situation is is not quite so simple.

Although the risk nationally and internationally is very low, the broad range of tree distribution, ownership and management combined with the clustered distribution of the population results in substantial peaks and troughs in the risks associated with tree failure. Some people are exposed to many trees on a daily basis and others barely ever encounter a tree. Some land owners seek to minimise the risks from tree failure and others don't manage tree safety at all. The risk to those who frequently encounter unmanaged trees will to be far greater than the risk to those who only occasionally encounter only well managed trees.

By reducing the likelihood of tree failure, past management of some trees has clearly influenced the current situation but has the allocation of resources to tree safety management been appropriate and proportionate? Probably not. There is a balance to be achieved between the reduction of risk, expenditure of resources and the loss of benefits associated with trees. For many municipalities and other large landowners, a reasonable balance has yet to be struck.

Historically the prompt for action has often been an incident publicised in the national media, resulting in resources being made available for tree safety management. It appears that, more often than not, resources are misdirected into the assessment and recording of individual trees until funds are exhausted. For this reason, those who manage the safety of their trees have tended to over manage some of their trees and under manage others simply because their chosen intensity of management cannot be sustained across their landholding within reasonable levels of funding.

Recent fatalities resulting from tree failure have seen a continuing trend of knee-jerk reactions with municipalities and other land owners, both large and small, responding by individually assessing and recording vast numbers of trees at considerable cost. But the cost doesn't stop there because the closer we look at trees the more likely we are to protect our personal position by recommending the remediation of often quite minor defects, the result of which

What is Quantified Tree Risk Assessment?

Tree safety management is a matter of limiting the risk of significant harm from tree failure whilst maintaining the benefits conferred by trees. Although it may seem counter intuitive, the condition of trees should not be the first consideration. Instead, tree managers should first consider the usage of land upon which trees stand and this in turn will inform the process of assessing trees.

The Quantified Tree Risk Assessment (QTRA) system applies established and accepted risk management principles to tree safety management. Firstly, the targets (people and property) upon which trees could fail are assessed and quantified, thus enabling tree managers to determine whether or not and to what degree of rigour a tree survey or inspection is required.

Where necessary, the tree or branch is considered in terms of both impact potential (size) and probability of failure. Values derived from the assessment of these three components (target, impact potential and probability of failure) are combined to calculate the probability of significant harm occurring.

The QTRA system moves the management of tree safety away from labelling trees as either 'safe' or 'unsafe', thereby requiring definitive statements of tree safety from either tree surveyors or tree managers. Instead, QTRA quantifies the risk of significant harm from tree failure in a way that enables managers to balance safety with tree value and operate to a predetermined threshold of acceptable risk.

QTRA is becoming increasingly accepted as the way forward for tree safety management in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. The system provides a robust method for the assessment of tree safety on all land use types and can result in substantially reduced levels of both tree assessment and the remedial felling and pruning of trees.

It is now more than two years since our first Quantified Tree Risk Assessment training workshop and we have now trained more than 400 Licensed Users of the system. We have many local authority users with 52 councils in England, 17 in Australia, 5 in Wales, 3 in Scotland and 2 in Eire.

For additional information on the system and how it can benefit you and the tree populations you manage, visit our website at www.qtra.info to browse or download information.

can be severe degradation of the visual and ecological value of the landscape with no significant reduction in risk.

So, should we inspect all of our trees or assess none of them? Perhaps a reasonable balance is to take an overview of our tree populations and prioritise assessments, building up from these foundations year on year until we attain a reasonable balance. Neither safety nor landscape will profit from the over-management of trees.

Visual Tree Assessment Training

We have now hosted our successful 'Practitioners Guide to Visual Tree Assessment' workshop eighteen times over the past two years. The workshop centres on the concept that to understand tree stability and the effects of defects and decay, we must have an understanding of how defects and decay follow growth patterns. This intensive one-day workshop is limited to fifteen places and takes you through the visual tree assessment process to look at the assessment of tree stability and mapping decay using visual and audible observations and a simple nylon hammer.

We are repeating this workshop in the UK and Australia during Summer 2007 and New Zealand Arboricultural Association's annual conference in November 2007. The cost of the workshop includes the Thor 710 nylon hammer.

For further details or an online booking form visit our website at www.qtra.info

Practitioners Guide to Visual Tree Assessment Workshops (2007)

- 20 June** Calke Abbey, Derbyshire, UK
- 1 Aug** Sydney, New South Wales, Australia
- 7 Aug** Cairns, Queensland, Australia
- 20 Nov** Christchurch, New Zealand

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Training Events

Below are details of our scheduled QTRA and Visual Tree Assessment training workshops for the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia during 2007.

To attend a QTRA workshop or for additional information on the system, visit our website at www.qtra.info to browse or download information.

You can register interest in the 'Becoming a Licensed User' area of the website. When you have entered your contact details and selected a username and password, an introductory letter and a sample licence agreement will be emailed to you. There is access to further downloads and there is an online booking form on the 'Training Calendar' page.

Quantified Tree Risk Assessment Training (2007)

- 2 Aug** Sydney, New South Wales, Australia
- 7 Aug** Cairns, Queensland, Australia
- 5 Sept** Adelaide, South Australia
- 13 Sept** Edinburgh, Midlothian, UK
- 25 Sept** Forest of Dean, Gloucs, UK
- 27 Sept** Worplesdon, Surrey, UK
- 2 Oct** Calke Abbey, Derbyshire, UK
- 11 Oct** Nantwich, Cheshire UK
- 22 Oct** Brisbane, Queensland, Australia
- 25 Oct** Melbourne, Victoria, Australia
- 29 Oct** Perth, Western Australia
- 21 Nov** Christchurch, New Zealand

QTRA User Discussion List

The QTRA website includes a User Discussion List, which is a hugely valuable resource that allows QTRA Users share their experiences, contributing to discussion and debate on QTRA and wider tree safety issues.

The QTRA Discussion List informs the ongoing development and improvement of the system.

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