

MAY/JUN 2025

Volume 16

Number 3

UTILITY ARBORIST NEWSLINE

FOCUS ON SAFETY

WHAT ARBORISTS NEED TO KNOW

NEW ANSI Z133-2025 ELECTRICAL
SAFETY UPDATES

PAVING THE WAY
TO SAFER DRIVING
TECHNOLOGY AND TRAINING

EMPOWERING
WOMEN IN VM
A BOLD STEP FORWARD





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Journeyman Tree Trimmer,
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This is a list of common industry terms and acronyms frequently used in this magazine.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)
Best Management Practices (BMPs)
Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG)
Integrated Vegetation Management (IVM)
Geographic Information System (GIS)

Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR)
Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
Rights-of-Way (ROW)

Subject Matter Expert (SME)
Transmission and Distribution (T&D)
Utility Vegetation Management (UVM)
Vegetation Management (VM)

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- 22 Challenges and Wins in the Application of Human and Organizational Performance



Turn to **page 22** to read about the effects of Human and Organizational Performance in UVM safety.

Get familiar with new electrical safety updates in ANSI Z133-2025 on **page 40**.



Read about the forward movement of women in VM on **page 44 & 45**.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Matt Goff



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UAA Progress and Upcoming Opportunities: Strengthening Our Community

Dear UAA Members,

The UAA Board of Directors (BOD) has been diligently working to enhance our organization and better serve your evolving needs. The start of 2025 has been particularly productive, marked by strategic meetings, vital internal improvements, and significant advancements in our outreach and funding initiatives.

On January 15, recognizing the importance of organizational health, we held a special meeting with our dedicated volunteers and HR consultants. This session addressed recent staffing and volunteer transitions, reinforcing our commitment to upholding our obligations and duties to you. We focused on key learnings, particularly in improving empathy, psychological safety, and communication pathways within the UAA. These crucial improvements are essential to fostering a supportive and effective environment where we can all thrive.

Our Executive Committee (EC) meeting on January 21 saw the implementation of advanced software tools designed to streamline grant opportunity identification. While software might not always be the most glamorous aspect of our work, these tools will significantly boost our ability to secure funding and drive essential investments into our industry. By efficiently mining for suitable grant opportunities, we aim to increase acceptance rates and further our strategic goal of supporting vegetation management initiatives.

The rescheduled December BOD meeting, held on January 27, was crucial for addressing key organizational matters. We approved staff travel to several affiliate conferences, demonstrating our commitment to expanding our influence and building strategic alliances. The UAA participated in the Sustainable Urban Forests Coalition (SUFC) conference and commissioned our first UAA Ambassador to the Georgia Vegetation Management Association (GVMA) conference in April. These initiatives are vital for positioning the UAA as the leading resource for all things VM.

February continued this momentum with further EC and BOD meetings. We finalized memorandums of understanding with the TCIA and ISA, solidifying our collaborative relationships and maximizing benefits for all parties. We also completed the hiring process for our new Events Coordinator and Membership Coordinator. We are excited to welcome these

new professionals to the UAA family, and we encourage you to connect with them at Trees & Utilities in Knoxville, Tennessee, this September.

Our grant initiatives, under the dedicated leadership of Sam Wilson, are flourishing. We have nearly \$400,000 in active applications across various stages. This remarkable achievement is a testament to Sam's hard work and our organization's commitment to securing vital funding for our members and the industry.

We are also focused on expanding the UAA Ambassador program. We believe this program is a valuable way to increase the UAA's presence and influence within the industry. Here's a snapshot of upcoming UAA events:

- **System Utility Vegetation Managers Summit**—Kalispell, Montana, May 13–15
- **Texas Regional Meeting**—Fort Worth, Texas, June 2025
- **Gettysburg Regional Meeting**—Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, July 15–16
- **California Safety Summit**—San Ramon, California, July 29–30
- **BNEAT**—Chesterton, Indiana, August 12–14
- **Trees & Utilities**—Knoxville, Tennessee, September 9–11
- **Ohio Regional Meeting**—Chagrin, Ohio, October 3
- **Western Regional Meeting**—San Diego, California, November 10–11

Please remember to exercise your right to vote in the upcoming elections, attend the Annual Business Meeting in August, and nominate deserving peers for awards and board positions. This is your organization, and your voice matters. Your participation is crucial to the success of UAA. We are working to improve annual meeting attendance, and we encourage you to join us for an hour to learn about the work being done to support our industry.

And, of course, don't miss the **Trees & Utilities conference in Knoxville this September 9–11, 2025!** It is a fantastic opportunity to network, learn, and contribute to the growth of VM. We are committed to advancing the UAA as the premier resource for all aspects of vegetation management.

Thank you for trusting me to lead your organization! 🌱

Matt Goff



SAVE THE DATES

member.gotouaa.org/events

REGIONAL MEETINGS



TEXAS

June 11–12, 2025 | Fort Worth



PENNSYLVANIA

July 15–15, 2025 | Gettysburg

SAFETY SUMMIT



CALIFORNIA

July 29–30, 2025 | San Ramon

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MESSAGE



Dennis Fallon

Given the high-risk environments our industry manages every day, it is no surprise safety is at the forefront of our daily discussions.

Established by the National Safety Council (NSC) in 1996, June is officially Safety Month in the U.S. According to the NSC website, the idea is to hold the annual observance “to help keep each other safe from the workplace to anyplace.” Given the high-risk environments our industry manages every day, it is no surprise safety is at the forefront of our daily discussions. As I look back at the past year of safety within the UAA, I am amazed at how many important discussions have been taking place with solutions being offered to the frontline workers.

For starters, the long process of updating the 2017 version of the Z133 standard was completed. Our UAA members were involved in the process the entire way. Significant updates went into Section 4—Electrical Hazards, which are covered in more detail in this very issue of the *Newsline*. In the 2017 revision, the role of Line Clearance Arborist was broken into three categories: unqualified, incidental, and utility line clearance arborists. In the new 2025 revision, those three categories are redefined and broken into four levels.

In the 2017 revision of the ANSI Z133, radio frequency (RF) risk was not referenced in the standard. In the 2025 revision, RF is addressed in Section 4.1.18 and includes a “shall” statement for employers around training. The UAA Safety Committee has been working on creating resources that can assist employers. The 2025 revision also clarifies who is an arborist under the ambit of the Z133 standard—spoiler alert: anyone getting paid to work on a tree is going to be considered an arborist, subject to the standard of care created by the Z. Keep your eyes peeled for trainings, conference offerings, and webinars providing deeper context on the updates included in the 2025 revision.

Another area of focus for the UAA Safety Committee has been public gun violence against tree workers. Statistics from the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA) show no reported incidents between 2021–2023, but five incidents in 2024 alone. Sara Dreiser and Rich Alexander accepted a request from the

TCIA to write an article on this topic to bring the dialog on this disturbing trend to the forefront. Truth be told, there has not been much documented work published in this area specific to tree crews or other outdoor mobile worksites.

If these two topics alone weren't enough, the group has also been working on continuing to advance other areas of safety for our industry. The discussion continues around understanding Human and Organizational Performance (HOP)—or “Safety-I,” “Safety-II,” “Safety Differently,” or any one of the other names given to the concept that fallible humans are doing the work. It must be taking root in my brain because the other day when someone told me about a marketing campaign not getting pushed out the way they expected, my mind immediately compared the black line of how we think work will occur with the blue line of how work actually occurs. There is still work to be done in this space, which is highlighted by the fact that we still have multiple names for the same thing.

Another exciting development is the work Dan Oberlies and the team are doing on the Energy Wheel concept, translating the wheel into tree talk. Any time we can translate complex concepts into frameworks our frontline folks can relate to is worth the time and effort. I look forward to learning more about their work this year.

Safety is a core value at the UAA, and the Safety Committee is taking on the tough task of tackling topics that may not have clear answers. They are leading in this space, because talking about safety requires the vulnerability to admit that things may not or did not go as planned. It takes courage to be vulnerable and honest, especially when all the answers have not been identified. The industry, the UAA, and our crews are blessed to have highly dedicated and skilled leaders willing to step up and tackle tough topics, even when we know revisions along the way are necessary. Enjoy this safety-themed issue of the UAN—and make it a safe day. 🌿

Dennis Fallon



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SAFETY COMMITTEE UPDATE



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Safety Committee Status Report

By David Hawley, Manager-Vegetation Services, Florida Power & Light

The Utility Arborist Association Safety Committee is fully engaged and has a dynamic group of professionals dedicated to enhancing safety standards across the industry. The committee delves into crucial topics each month, reinforcing the UAA's commitment to safety and operational excellence across the utility line clearance industry.

The Safety Committee has been working diligently to complete tasks created over the last year. The committee membership has shown a commitment to industry safety in creating frontline user-friendly products to support the safety mission. Here are some key initiatives the team has been engaged with over the last year.

Significant progress has been made in various ongoing initiatives, including developing new safety tools and resources. One such innovation is a Safety Wheel, which integrates enhanced visual aids to help field personnel identify and mitigate risks effectively. This initiative exemplifies the committee's efforts to tailor safety tools to the specific needs of utility arborists. This product will provide industry-specific graphics and language to better communicate the value of the energy wheel in pre-job evaluations and ongoing hazard recognition.

During meetings, the committee also highlights the need for continuous improvement and learning within safety practices. Members often share updates on educational initiatives and upcoming webinars in areas such as violence prevention against tree workers, a pressing issue within the industry. The committee

members are actively engaged in providing presentations and webinars highlighting the hazards and mitigations when dealing with hostile members of the public.

The committee continues to discuss the implications of distracted driving and the integration of artificial intelligence tools to mitigate these risks. These discussions are part of the UAA's broader strategy to harness technology for safety enhancements. The committee is working on creating a benchmarking survey to gain important knowledge on where companies are on the journey of fleet safety management across the industry.

The Safety Committee continues to extend the "Safety Tools" column with our *Newsline* initiative into 2025, with contributions from various members. The topics include community outreach, environmental stewardship, technology and innovation, and education and workforce development. Additionally, the committee partners with the UAA Events Committee to promote safety summits and webinars, with some members working to create a sample safety summit agenda to support the ongoing development and growth of the summit program.

The project titled "Communication Antennas: The Potential Hazards of RF, a Cautionary Tale," are coming to completion in 2025. The committee will coordinate with folks who created the original PSA and tailor a summarized communication regarding the importance of understanding potential risk as well as being able to find and review important signage and placards at RF cell sites. The focus will be on

awareness of what to look for to stay informed.

The UAA Safety Committee has followed and supported closely the 2025 Z133 Safety Standards. We encourage everyone to review this document to stay ahead in understanding upcoming safety standards. Member of the UAA Safety Committee have been instrumental in creating presentations to better explain the changes in the new Z133 standards. The committee continues to work through the update of the Z133 Standards while looking for the most effective way to share the knowledge.

Several members of the Safety Committee also sit on the Utility Line Clearance Safety Partnership (ULCSP). These members bring us updates and discuss opportunities to collaborate and share the load on important safety initiatives, standards, and communications.

The UAA Safety Committee's work is vital to fostering a culture of safety that extends beyond compliance to genuine care for the well-being of all members of the utility arboriculture community. The committee encourages active participation from its members, believing that diverse insights and experiences are crucial to advancing safety standards.

We invite all UAA members to join the Safety Committee and contribute to this critical dialogue. Your expertise and perspective can make a significant difference in the lives of utility arboriculture workers. The UAA Safety Committee continues to make significant strides in promoting safety across the UVM industry. We are truly proud to serve. 🌳



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OUTREACH COMMITTEE UPDATE

UAA Survey Results

The UAA Outreach Committee recently conducted a survey to gather valuable feedback from industry professionals, providing insights into demographics, membership satisfaction, and industry challenges. With responses from professionals across North America and beyond, the survey results paint a comprehensive vision to address the challenges the industry faces in the years to come.

MEMBERSHIP VALUE: HIGH SATISFACTION

One of the most notable findings is that 96% of respondents believe they receive good value for the price they pay for their UAA membership. This high level of satisfaction highlights the value members place on the resources, networking opportunities, and educational offerings provided by the UAA.

TOP BENEFITS OF JOINING THE UAA

The UAA offers a wide range of benefits to their membership. Members were asked to rank a list of benefits in order of importance, showing that UAA members prioritize educational programming and networking events above all. While CEUs and the *Newsline* are also valued, the high support for educational events underscores the need to continue providing opportunities for members to engage with the broader industry communities and further their professional development.

EMPLOYER-PAID MEMBERSHIPS REMAIN COMMON

When asked who covers their membership cost, 75% of respondents said their employer paid. A strong industry trend, companies recognize the value of supporting their employees' professional development and industry engagement. 25% of respondents reported paying for their own membership, demonstrating that many professionals take personal responsibility for investing in their career growth and industry involvement.

AGE DEMOGRAPHICS: A BROAD RANGE OF PROFESSIONALS

The age distribution of respondents showcases a broad range of industry experience, with a noticeable concentration in the 40–49 age group (38%). The diversity in age groups highlights the multigenerational nature of the UVM industry and suggests that the UAA serves a wide variety of professionals at different stages in their careers:

- 18–29 years old: 7%
- 30–39 years old: 20%
- 40–49 years old: 38%
- 50–69 years old: 23 %
- 60–69 years old: 12%

GEOGRAPHIC REACH: MEMBERS PRIMARILY BASED IN THE U.S.

The survey revealed that the UAA's membership is primarily based in the United States, with 79% identifying the U.S. as their country of residence. Other respondents are in Canada, Jamaica, and Peru.

ETHNICITY AND DIVERSITY: A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE DEMOGRAPHIC

When asked about ethnicity, the results showed that most respondents identify as White or Caucasian (78%). A smaller percentage of respondents identified as Black or African American (3%), Hispanic or Latino (4%), or Native American or Alaska Native (1%). These results suggest that the UAA serves a predominantly White demographic and continued efforts are needed to encourage greater diversity and inclusivity.

GENDER REPRESENTATION: MALE-DOMINATED BUT DIVERSE

Regarding gender, 67% of respondents identify as male and 27% of respondents as female, indicating a male-dominated membership. This gender breakdown reflects the broader trends seen in the utility arboriculture industry, where men continue to outnumber women, though efforts to increase gender diversity are ongoing.

PREFERRED LANGUAGES: ENGLISH AS THE PRIMARY LANGUAGE

The results revealed that 95% of respondents prefer to communicate in English, while a smaller percentage prefers French and Spanish. These results align with the geographic distribution of members, with the majority based in English-speaking countries. The presence of members who speak other languages suggests the potential to engage with a broader multilingual audience.

ENGAGING AND DEVELOPING THE NEXT GENERATION OF UTILITY ARBORISTS

As many experienced industry leaders approach retirement, there's a growing concern to ensure the next generation of professionals can effectively step into these crucial roles. The survey asked how the UAA can better engage with and develop the next generation of utility arborists to fill that void. Below is a summary of the results, in order of topics most mentioned.

1. Targeted Outreach and Engagement

One of the main suggestions is to ramp up outreach efforts, particularly through direct engagement with younger professionals. By understanding the next generation's unique needs, the UAA can tailor its programs to meet them. This involves surveying the new workforce, asking about their challenges, and using feedback to create more relevant resources and opportunities. Additionally, the UAA could focus on reaching out to younger, enthusiastic individuals through platforms like social media, virtual seminars, and online content to make the association more accessible and attractive.

2. Mentorship and Leadership Development

Mentorship is consistently cited as a critical element in developing the next generation. Senior leaders can serve as mentors, passing on



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GROW WITH TREES



OUTREACH COMMITTEE UPDATE

their vast knowledge to newcomers to the industry. Programs where younger professionals can shadow experienced members, learn best practices, and receive guidance on career progression are needed. Leaders in the field could also hold “passing the torch” sessions at conferences, where they share their experiences with younger professionals in a structured, engaging way.

3. Educational Programs and Certifications

Developing additional formal educational and certification programs is another priority for engaging future utility arborists. By establishing robust, accessible educational tracks, the UAA can help newcomers gain the credentials needed to succeed in the industry.

4. Creating Career Pathways and Incentives

Clear career pathways, including advancement potential, are essential to attracting young professionals to the field. It's important for the UAA to describe these pathways to highlight the opportunities available from entry-level roles to leadership positions. Additionally, offering incentives, such as discounted memberships for field employees and providing companies with opportunities to send staff to events, can help engage new talent.

5. Promoting Diversity and Inclusion

The next generation of arborists is diverse, and it's crucial that we create an inclusive environment that appeals to everyone. This includes reaching out to a variety of backgrounds, including younger people, minorities, and those passionate about sustainability and environmental stewardship. Creating specialized cohorts, like groups for under-40 professionals or newcomers to the industry, can provide a platform for these individuals to connect, share ideas,

and grow their careers.

6. Building Awareness through Early Education

Some respondents suggest beginning earlier to reach out to younger generations, targeting K-12 schools. Introducing students to utility arboriculture through educational programs, career fairs, and hands-on learning experiences could help spark interest. Collaborating with colleges and universities that offer forestry or utility-related programs can increase awareness of industry career opportunities.

PRIORITIES IN THE NEXT 3-5 YEARS

As the utility arboriculture industry looks ahead to the next 3-5 years, industry professionals identified critical areas of focus. Here's an overview of significant topics or disruptors in the industry, ranked from highest importance by professionals in the field:

1. Establishing a Nationwide Shared Data Lake to Aggregate Tree Outage Data

One of the most frequently cited priorities is the creation of a nationwide shared data lake to aggregate tree outage data. Given its far-reaching potential, this issue was rated one of the most important disruptors for the next few years.

2. Templates Based on Integrated Vegetation Management

IVM continues to be a core focus in utility arboriculture, and the implementation of IVM standardized templates is seen as essential for streamlining practices. Developing these templates could provide utilities with a structured approach that encourages best practices.

3. Educational Efforts Targeting Regulators and Officials

Regulatory frameworks significantly impact the operations of utility arborists, making it crucial for the UAA to focus on educational efforts targeting regulators and officials. Many responses highlighted the

need for the association to engage policymakers and government officials with clear, detailed training about vegetation management and the role of arborists in reducing outages and ensuring grid reliability.

4. Creating UAA-Authored Credentials and Training Materials

Creating UAA-authored credentials and endorsed training materials was frequently mentioned as a necessary professional development step to ensure utility arborists are well-equipped to tackle future challenges. With standardized training and certification programs, the UAA can help raise industry standards and create a more skilled workforce capable of adapting to new technological advancements and evolving regulations.

BARRIERS TO ADVANCING IN THE UTILITY ARBORIST CAREER

The survey asked UVM professionals to identify barriers for furthering their careers. A recurring theme in the responses was the lack of opportunity. Many respondents felt limited by a shortage of career advancement opportunities, especially at higher management levels. Lack of education opportunities was another frequently mentioned barrier, particularly the need for more specialized training or professional development resources to help progress in their careers.

Additionally, a lack of a good network with influential people was another challenge. Networking, both within and outside organizations, appears to play a critical role in career advancement for members, and the absence of strong professional connections hinders career growth.

CONCLUSION

The feedback gathered from this survey will be instrumental in guiding the UAA's future initiatives and ensuring the needs of its diverse membership are met. Through these initiatives, the UAA can foster a more informed, efficient, and sustainable UVM industry that is ready to meet the challenges of tomorrow. 🌳

Leveraging Emerging Technology

National Grid's Vegetation Management teams are focused on leveraging emerging technology and investments to continually improve efficiency. National Grid's Vegetation Management teams manage 42,000 circuit miles encompassing distribution, sub-transmission, and transmission lines in Upstate New York, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont. Since 2021, National Grid's distribution service region in Massachusetts has used satellite imagery combined with AI-generated analytics to help identify risks for each circuit and inform which circuits the maintenance program should address each year.

In 2024, a pilot program using three-dimensional LiDAR technology to explore efficiency opportunities was initiated within the New York jurisdiction. LiDAR is a remote sensing method that measures distances to specific targets using light. National Grid has used LiDAR in New England for several years in its transmission VM program, and the New York jurisdiction is looking to expand the technology to distribution and sub-transmission.

This pilot project presents a transformative opportunity for National Grid to assess the benefits of LiDAR technology in VM, enhancing operational efficiency by better understanding the costs associated with vegetation maintenance. A total of 330 circuit miles were flown, covering distribution networks and sixty-seven miles of transmission and sub-transmission lines within a specific geographic area.

National Grid aims to understand workload and its associated costs; identify tree species at elevated risk of decline, such as ash trees impacted by emerald ash borers; assess tree diameter volumes to estimate costs for tree growth regulator treatment programs; and evaluate tree health within proximity to the rights-of-way.

A significant use case is deciding the "should cost" to perform routine pruning. Like many utilities, National Grid bids out much of the pruning work. However, real data is needed to show what the actual work volumes are along the circuits. By associating actual work volumes with past and historic costs on a circuit, National Grid is looking to establish a benchmark for future "should costs" for each circuit.

By examining tree health and distance from the ROW, National Grid aims to focus spending on hazard trees that have the highest impact on customers. The company has a robust tree outage review program in which the tree species with the highest failure rates are identified. By combining LiDAR species identification with outage data, resources can be directed to locations that will provide the greatest level of reliability.

National Grid is also investing in the development of mobile field data collection, auditing, and scheduling of VM work. For about a decade, National Grid has used an internally built ESRI-based mobile application. The program is titled VIPER (Vegetation Inspection Planning Evaluation Reporting). VIPER and its platform have served its purpose, but as with all digital tools, it has become antiquated. In 2024, it was decided that a new, more robust web-based application with real-time data transfer capabilities would be more efficient. In 2025, a new mobile application VIPERpro will be launched, and users will see all work types, scheduled jobs, and audits in a real-time platform.

By embracing technology and tool development, National Grid's Vegetation Management teams aim to support and improve system reliability while maximizing efficiency. These technologies try to protect infrastructure investments, maintain system reliability, and support financial efficiency targets. 🌳



SAFETY TOOLS

Prioritizing Wellness in a Busy World

By Raul E. Perez Jr., Safety Manager, ACRT Pacific

The month of May marks Mental Health Awareness Month by the National Alliance on Mental Illness, a time to reflect on the importance of mental well-being. It's a topic that resonates deeply with many people, especially those who have faced personal struggles throughout their careers. One message I revisit often is:

"If you don't make time for your wellness, you will be forced to make time for your illness."

JOYCE SUNADA

This statement resonates deeply because, all too often, we neglect our health while juggling our daily responsibilities. Whether it's work, family, finances, or personal obligations, it is easy to lose sight of what keeps us physically and mentally balanced. Ignoring the warning signs of stress, chronic fatigue, anxiety, or sleep deprivation can have serious consequences for your mental health. Therefore, it is essential to dedicate time for self-care before it becomes a necessity.

A PERSONAL WAKE-UP CALL

Early in my career as a field supervisor, I had a startling experience. I awoke one morning to a numbness and tingling sensation in my face and realized half of my face was paralyzed. Naturally, I panicked. Fearing it was a stroke, I consulted with my doctor and was diagnosed with Bell's palsy, a nerve condition often triggered by stress that causes temporary paralysis on one side of your face. For many months, I worked

through the condition, eventually regaining full mobility. This experience was a wake-up call, teaching me the value of taking care of my personal health, staying calm, and managing stress effectively.

SMALL STEPS FOR BIG CHANGES

Mental health care does not have to be complicated. Here are some practical suggestions:

- 1. Prioritize self-care.** Make sure you're taking care of yourself by getting enough sleep, eating a healthy diet, and engaging in activities that bring you joy.
- 2. Seek help when needed.** If you are experiencing symptoms of depression, anxiety, or other mental health issues, seek help from a mental health professional or healthcare provider.
- 3. Practice stress management.** Learning stress management techniques, such as meditation, mindfulness, grounding exercises, or yoga, can help you manage stress and improve your mental health.
- 4. Connect with others.** Stay connected with friends and family, as social support is important for mental health. Check in with coworkers, friends, or family. A simple, "How are you doing?" can make a significant difference. Many of us are familiar with each other's typical behaviors so noticing when something is off can lead to valuable support.
- 5. Monitor your mental health.** Pay attention to changes in your mood or behavior and seek help if you notice any concerning changes.

Additional tips for maintaining balance include finding your fulfilling

outlet, whether it's listening to music on your commute, taking a walk outdoors, or trying a new hobby. These small acts can provide balance and joy. Another aspect is showing appreciation to others, letting people know they are valued. Gratitude not only uplifts others but also enhances your own sense of well-being. And finally, leverage your resources, such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), which are tools you can use to access professional help when needed.

YOUR SELF-CARE, YOUR WAY

Remember, self-care is personal. What works for you may not work for another, and that is okay. The key is to find something that brings you peace and helps you recharge.

As we observe Mental Health Awareness Month, let us commit to making our well-being a priority—not just this month, but every day. After all, a healthier you is the foundation for a happier life.

Stay safe and take care. 🌱





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UVM AND THE LAW

The Dangerous Legal Gaps in Utility Tree Care

By R. Michael Herman, Associate Attorney, Murphy, Rogers, Sloss, Gambel & Tompkins

Since 1996, the National Safety Council has observed June as National Safety Month, aiming to increase public awareness of workplace safety. In line with this effort, the International Labor Organization declared April 28 as World Day for Safety and Health at Work. Despite these and other well-meaning initiatives, certain occupations remain extremely hazardous—and utility arboriculture is unfortunately among them. According to a 2023 report by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, utility arborists have a fatality rate **thirty** times higher than the national average. Why is this happening, and what can be done?

Safety obligations are a function of law and regulation. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) was established in the 1970 Occupational Safety and Health Act, a bipartisan effort enacted by President Nixon and led by Senator Williams (D-NJ) and Senator Steiger (R-WI). OSHA's task is to set and enforce workplace safety and health standards (see 29 USC 651-678). The act also established the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), which researches occupational safety and health, and the Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission (OSHRC), an independent agency that adjudicates enforcement actions challenged by employers. Although states may have their own agencies to provide stricter standards, only 21 states (plus one territory) have safety agencies that oversee private employers. And few state agencies have specific laws and regulations addressing utility arboriculture safety. As a result, safety regulation is primarily a federal function.

OSHA has played a crucial role in reducing workplace fatalities. In 1971, when enforcement began, there were approximately 56 million workers and 16,000 workplace deaths (1 per 3,500 workers). Fifty years later, the workforce had

nearly doubled to 105 million, yet fatalities dropped to fewer than 5,500—less than 1 per 19,100 workers.

Within federal regulations governing utility arboriculture, the primary provisions are found in 29 C.F.R. §§1910.266 (Logging), 1910.331 (Electrical Safety), and 1910.269 (Line Clearance). While §1910.331 (Electrical Safety) provides clear requirements for electrical safety work practices, many provisions in §§1910.266 (Logging) and 1910.269 (Line Clearance) are vague and non-specific. For example, §1910.266 (Logging) requires first aid kits during logging operations, but the regulation only mandates that the number of kits and their contents “reflect the degree of isolation, the number of employees, and the hazards reasonably anticipated at the work site.” Instead of imposing clear requirements, this subjective standard allows for employer discretion, which can lead to inconsistent safety measures. Similarly, §1910.269 (Line Clearance) requires employees to receive training in “safety-related practices” without defining what those practices entail. Such vagueness not only places workers at risk but also hampers enforcement efforts by OSHA inspectors.

Burdened with almost unenforceable regulations, many OSHA inspectors have effectively stopped inspecting utility arboriculture work, leading to dire consequences. For example, OSHA Region 1 (New England) recorded 31 industry-related fatalities from 2016–2021 and, in response, initiated a Regional Emphasis Program (REP) in August 2021 to reduce fatalities and injuries by increasing inspection and enforcement. OSHA has not yet released comprehensive data regarding the REP's impact, but Region 1 has stated that it remains committed to improving safety within the industry.

The National Electric Safety Code (NESC) provides minimal regulation for utility line clearance, addressing it only in Section 218. NESC-218 requires utilities to maintain “adequate clearance” between powerlines and vegetation to prevent arcing, outages, and fires. However, it allows utilities to determine clearance distances based on their own experience, leading to inconsistent application. A company-by-company standard is no standard at all and fails to provide meaningful protection for utility arborists.

Indeed, a 2004 report by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) noted that while many state utility commissions had adopted the NESC by rule, Section 218 was often interpreted by states as a guideline and not a strict mandate.





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The most comprehensive safety standards for utility arboriculture are set by the American National Standards Institute's Z133. This standard, developed by industry experts, is frequently updated to reflect advancements in safety practices. OSHA has not adopted Z133 as a regulation, meaning compliance is voluntary and unenforceable. OSHA, however, can cite Z133 as evidence of industry best practices when enforcing the General Duty Clause (29 USC 654(a)(1)), which requires employers to provide a workplace free from recognized hazards. While this approach allows OSHA to penalize employers after a worker is injured or killed, it does not require proactive measures to prevent accidents from occurring.

One potential solution is to strengthen OSHA's enforcement authority by implementing clearer, enforceable regulations specific to utility arboriculture. There is another possibility: better laws and regulations regarding tree planting and maintenance following Right Tree, Right Place principles. Poor planting choices by property owners endanger utility arborists, and holding these owners liable for injuries resulting from hazardous vegetation could encourage better decision-making. This could lead to more strategic planting practices and proactive vegetation management, reducing risks before they reach a critical level.



Michael Herman

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Herman earned his B.A. in political science from Tulane University in 2020 and his J.D. from Tulane Law School in 2023, with a certificate in maritime law. He was a 2022 UVM Scholar and received a scholarship to present his research at the Environmental Concerns in Rights-of-Way Management conference in 2022. An

associate attorney at Murphy, Rogers, Sloss, Gambel & Tompkins in New Orleans, he is admitted to practice law in all Louisiana courts, the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, and the U.S. District Courts for the Eastern, Middle, and Western Districts of Louisiana. He is a member of the Louisiana State Bar Association and the Federal Bar Association. 🌳



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Safety and Vegetation Work Management

Safety reigns supreme for utilities as they work towards vegetation management, improving reliability and providing for the community in which they provide services. Safety actions are not limited to just utility employees and contractors—these concerns also consider customers, property, as well as pets and livestock.

Utilities work continuously in providing training to both their internal employees and contractors to ensure all internal requirements and precautions are taken to better improve safe practices. This includes, but is not limited to, both handheld tools as well as larger vehicles and equipment.

Additional certifications—such as the UAA UVM Professional Development Program, which is an industry-recognized professional credential—provide further training for leaders in utility vegetation management. Community outreach and involvement also continues to be a large staple for utilities, including hosting events and providing safety and equipment training for individuals within the service territory.

GSI Forester, developed in partnership with utility vegetation managers, works to provide utilities with the planning tools necessary to ensure the safety of both staff and the community. Proper planning, such as having the appropriate equipment and utilizing public services such as law enforcement and transportation, provides a scenario for the success of utility efforts.

GSI is a private, woman-owned company providing software and services to electric and natural gas companies across North America. Learn more about GSI Forester at <https://www.gsiforester.com> and talk with our team to understand how Forester can provide tools for the safety of your staff and community. 🌳



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IVM: When Do I Start Saving?

If you're a utility vegetation manager, it's not news to you that a properly implemented Integrated Vegetation Management (IVM) program can: reduce carbon emissions; reduce labor requirements; restore native habitat and wildlife; and boost environmental, social and governance (ESG) scores. But field-proven research also points to a significant reduction in long-term VM expenses for managers adopting an IVM program. The question is when? How long before those savings are realized, and how exactly are they achieved?

To get answers, it's worth recalling how a successful IVM program works. Using selective herbicides and application methods, IVM preserves the grasses and forbs, or "early successional habitat," while controlling undesirable brush and trees. As this early successional habitat becomes established, it crowds out undesirable seedlings before they can become established. It's this biological control that forms the heart of a successful IVM program and provides the foundation for future cost reductions.



IVM: When the Savings Become Real

In his landmark study *The Cost-Efficiency of IVM: A Comparison of Vegetation Management Strategies for Utility Rights-of-Way*, industry consultant John Goodfellow compares long-term VM expenses by using two scenarios: 1. An IVM program under which a site is initially cleared and herbicides are applied every four years by cut-stubble treatment; and 2. A mowing-only strategy under which a site is mowed every four years. Goodfellow's findings mimic the real-world experiences of utility vegetation managers across the country.

"[B]ecause of the added cost of herbicide treatment during initial clearing, the IVM strategy is initially the higher cost strategy," he says. "At the time of first maintenance event (four years), the cost of mechanical maintenance overtakes that of the IVM."

Goodfellow further concludes: "An IVM-based strategy that includes the use of a variety of vegetation maintenance treatments including herbicides was shown to be significantly less costly as compared to the non-IVM strategy of repeated mowing. In most cases it was also shown to be more cost efficient at producing a variety of benefits."

IVM = ROI

All well and good, you might say, but where do the savings come from?

The establishment of early successional habitat helps prevent the growth of undesirable or invasive vegetation, extend cycle periods and reduce the frequency of treatments. Together, these help lower long-term VM expenses through a number of avenues, including:

Labor and Equipment Needs. Under a mechanical VM program, there's a fleet of equipment like tractors and mowers to be purchased or replaced, insured, fueled, maintained, and repaired. Under an IVM program, however, once that groundcover is established, herbicides will likely be applied by basal application or other individual plant treatment — meaning by smaller crews using backpack or ATV-mounted sprayers.

Chemical Usage. How can an herbicide-based program reduce chemical expense? Easy. As groundcover becomes established and individual plants are treated, stem counts will naturally decrease over time, meaning fewer total gallons applied per acre are required to control undesirable vegetation.

Adopting an IVM program doesn't have to be complicated or expensive. If you'd like to learn more about how IVM can help reduce your VM expenses, visit Corteva.us/UAA, or reach out to your local Corteva Agriscience Vegetation Management Specialist.



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A ROAD LESS TRAVELED

Amanda Opp

By Amanda Opp, Integrated Services Manager, Flathead Electric Cooperative, Inc.

My career path in utility vegetation management has been far from traditional—and perhaps that's the norm. I began my journey at Montana Tech in 1997 as a civil engineering student and landed an internship with the Forest Service. I performed maintenance assessments on bridges, fences, and buildings in the Bitterroot National Forest. The following summer at the Flathead National Forest, I explored various roles—from fish to bird surveys—and discovered those weren't for me.

After I graduated, I worked at the Cleveland National Forest in San Diego. My time with the Forest Service introduced me to people whose passion for community left a lasting impact. Returning to Montana after my husband's service in the Marine Corps, I found limited opportunities as a newly graduated civil engineer. Instead, I worked at a local bank for four years, building connections in my community.

This led me to apply for a part-time cashier job at Flathead Electric Cooperative—a coveted opportunity in a small town. Although I wasn't initially selected from over 200 applicants, a subsequent opening allowed me to join the team. I soon transitioned to the GIS department, where I spent four years converting paper workflows into digital systems for field data collection. This project not only increased efficiency but also deepened my passion for GIS, which has been a cornerstone of my professional growth. This success also helped me become more confident in my abilities.

When the previous vegetation management supervisor retired, I was offered the position. Despite having little



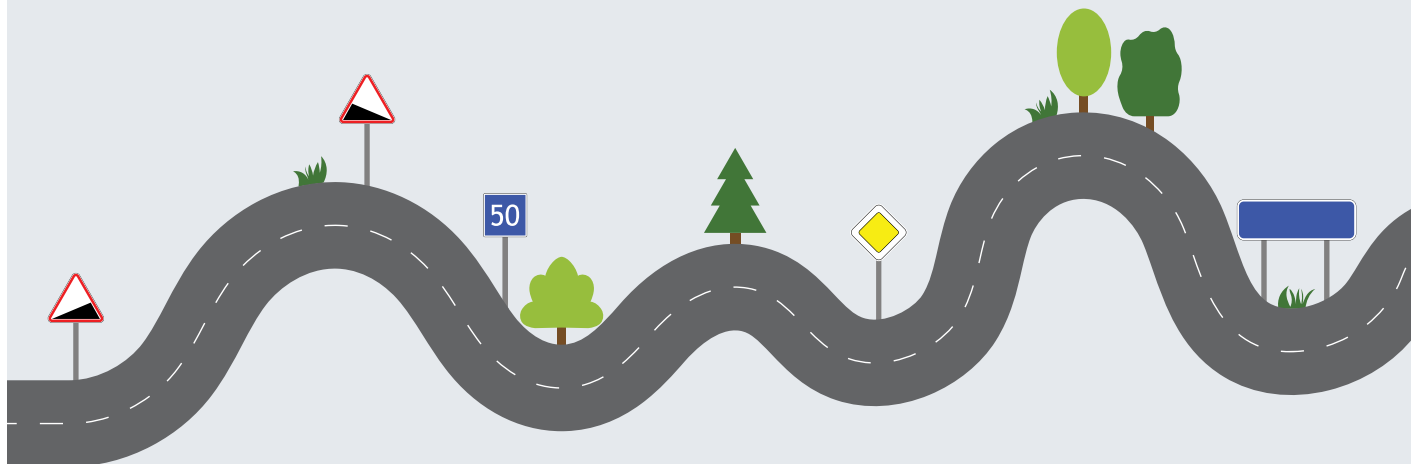
Amanda Opp

knowledge initially, I learned quickly from the team about tree species, proper clearances, and control methods. Early in my supervisory role, I enrolled in the UVM Professional Certificate program through SAIT, an intensive course that laid a strong foundation for my career and introduced me to several mentors and colleagues in the industry. Later, I joined the Women in UVM Workshop during the Covid-19 pandemic and served as one of four presenters, marking my first volunteer experience with the Utility Arborist Association. I ran for the UAA Board of Directors but didn't get elected back in 2022. I

was later appointed to the board, illustrating how our future often unfolds in unexpected yet rewarding ways.

In January 2023, I was promoted to Integrated Services Manager at my co-op, where I now oversee Facilities and Security, Warehouse, Meter Services, Wildfire Mitigation, and Vegetation Management. Transitioning from a "working manager" who directly supervised VM to this broader role meant we eventually hired a dedicated VM supervisor to help manage the workload.

On my meandering road to where I am today, there have been so many who have supported me, listened to me, cheered for me, cried with me, and gave me feedback, even when it wasn't easy. If you would've asked me back on campus at Montana Tech where I imagined being at this age, I would have never predicted this. What I hope others can learn from my path is that you don't necessarily need to take a traditional route and have a forestry degree to succeed in this industry. Work hard and find your path forward, and emulate those you want to be like and reach out to them to help you along the way. 🌲



A photograph of a worker in a yellow safety suit and hard hat operating a large, specialized machine to clear dense trees. The machine has a large cutting head and a platform for the operator. The background shows a dense forest of trees with autumn-colored leaves. A large, dark green, stylized tree graphic is overlaid on the right side of the image.

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Challenges and Wins in the Application of Human and Organizational Performance

By James Beery, Senior Safety Lead, Wright Tree Service

Like everyone, I am diligently trying to reduce incident occurrence, prevent serious injuries and fatalities, and nurture a safety culture that is vibrant and sustainable—I chose Safety-II, for many reasons.

Emerging from traditional safety (known now as Safety-I), we pass through names and initiatives such as Human Performance Improvement (HPI), Human Performance, Safety Differently, and then Safety-II, which is also referred to by many as HOP: Human and Organizational Performance. To me, these iterations have differences but are mostly the same. Now that we know the HOP/Safety-II history and principles, many of us search for concrete ways to initiate it and make it work in the real world.

What Is Human and Organizational Performance?

Human and Organizational Performance is a cultural approach to incident prevention—it's the people side of things. It builds upon the foundation of everyone and everything that came before us. That is, except for what we declare to have a negative effect. Negatives must be eliminated.

I use the Five Principles of HOP (Figure 1) as a filter for each event I face down or each set of culture issues I look to resolve. These principles come from Dr. Todd Conklin but are essentially a rewrite from the original principles that came out of the Department of Energy Manuals on Human Performance Improvement (volumes 1 and 2). Conklin's version has become widely known as Safety-II.

The current concepts of HOP (Figure 2) also come from Conklin. We believe the left side reveals a failed approach. More importantly, the right-hand column reveals important initiatives by themselves: (1) workers are the problem solvers and (2) we must ask workers what they need.

Workers at the Pointy End of the Stick

The "pointy stick graphic" (Figure 3) simply illustrates the roles and exposures in incident prevention. If the worker is the expert at knowing when deviations must be made in order to safely complete the work, then they also know when they are forced to adapt to conflicts and confusing directives. Workers must make things work, continually, by being flexible under volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous changing conditions.

As one moves down the stick, from the pointy end (where work is done) to the blunt end (where rules and procedures are often determined), understanding can be lost along the way. As workers are forced to interpret and adapt, we must ponder, *Do we all understand what we're asking?* If we are proposing methods different from what workers are used to, then we'll never really know if they can do it in our expected way—that's not good.

The Black and the Blue Line

Another famous and popular graphic for HOP is the Black and the Blue Line (work as planned versus work as practiced). Figure 4 illustrates how organizations set expectations based on a variety of methods, such as incident experience, lessons learned, legal requirements, industry practices, and more, which are demonstrated by a flat black line. The blue line represents worker deviations from black line expectations. Workers may exceed expectations and land above the black line, or fall below expectations and land below the black line. Choosing to deviate below the black line is an intentional act. By definition, that makes it a violation. However, it is important to differentiate between violations and deviations.

The dotted red line represents the dynamic nature of hazards and risks in real-world conditions. These conditions can be overlooked for many "human" reasons, some of which I describe in this article. As illustrated with a yellow explosion symbol, hazards and risks can eventually collide in space and time with a blue-line deviation. This is when an unwanted event occurs. The green slashes represent learning opportunities that come from mistakes, failures, near misses, early identification of weak signals, among others. In these spaces, we can fine-tune our control measures and enact initiatives and processes that ensure controls are continually taught, enforced, and in place before work begins.

The History and Evolution of My HOP Journey

I share a sentiment with Andrea Baker, a HOP colleague. She said I always had the HOP principles and concepts in my heart. I just didn't have the terminology and formal road map to go by; once I was introduced to it, I was hooked. It brought it all together for me.

HOP is hard to do. One day I'm winning, and the next day I'm falling. But I can clearly see the failed traditional approaches of the past, and regardless of the daunting nature of HOP, I think the changes are worth the fight and gray hair. With HOP, we need to start with what is broken. One could argue that most of what we deal with is broken or almost broken in some form or another. If our goal is to learn, share,



Figure 1. The Five Principles of HOP.



Figure 2. The current concepts of HOP, of which the left side reveals failed approaches and the right side represents the essential influence.

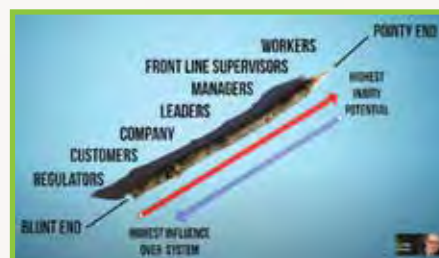


Figure 3. The "pointy stick graphic" illustrates the roles and exposures in incident prevention.

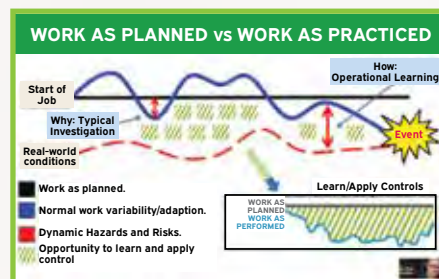


Figure 4. The Black and Blue Line shows how organizations set expectations (black line) while workers deviate from them (blue line), with hazards (red line) potentially colliding with deviations, highlighting the need for continuous learning and control improvement (green slashes).

and educate the workforce about what's really happening along the black line and blue line, then a "speak-up culture" is critical.

In a "command and control" environment, workers are looked upon as the problem, not the solution, which contradicts the concepts and principles of HOP. If punishment is looming, people won't feel psychologically safe to self-report—no way! Thus, learning isn't happening except for what comes from incidents that can't be hidden. That's obviously bad since those things only represent a small fraction of what's actually happening, and are too late anyway. And that doesn't include the lessons learned from success. Thus, leaders can become cynical in this dynamic. If we give the customers what they want and sacrifice the workers in the name of peace, that's no partnership! Without partnership based on transparency and respect, a "speak-up culture" is not possible—and there will never be learning.

I often felt disdain and outright anger toward a utility that had no patience for what it takes to make HOP work. Many of the managers outright rejected any continuation of HOP where it does not serve their needs. But it takes both the utility and the contractor to make HOP fully work.

I made a conscious choice to change my tactics. Instead of combatting a utility that was not interested in changing, I decided to get closer to them. I joined every meeting that was open to the contractor to attend. I asked for and received time to speak about the HOP culture. I shared every initiative and every challenge we had. I was open with every win and every loss, including some frustrations.

What I found was individuals at the utility shared my passion for preventing incidents—we could bond over that. The problem

was the bigger utility culture could not support a HOP culture while also simultaneously embracing a traditional command-and-control or co-employer status. From this greater utility culture, often too many directives and responses were punitive, which stifles the ability to learn, and HOP begins to die.

In my own company, I have both supporters and those who don't like what I'm preaching. Those who disagree feel they can't spend the time it takes for HOP to bear fruit. So, the question remains: how do we break through to those who outrightly reject HOP?

HOP Is Hard—but Worth It

Support for HOP can come and go based on traditional success measures, such as incident rates, or worse, it can wane from impatience. And there are those who will never accept it because they believe that heavy-handedness is the best way forward. HOP requires leadership—specifically, there must be a champion.

Ultimately, the goal of HOP is to prevent incidents through learning, which comes from workers who feel psychologically safe enough to share their mistakes while the mistakes are small. Because in the end, coming down hard on workers continues to *not be* the best course of action. It drives a wedge. Absolute control over workers is counterproductive to HOP. If we preach psychological safety and promote speaking up only to turn around and criticize a mistake, we reinforce our own deception and perpetuate the cycle we don't want.

HOP is hard. It's hard! It's hard because it takes time, effort, and energy to look at each person as a separate entity. But to me, it's well worth the effort. 🌱



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Paving the Way to Safer Driving Through Technology and Training

By Chad Fay, Senior Vice President of Operations Support, Lewis Services

Asked to name the most dangerous careers a person can have, many would likely list firefighting and police work. Unquestionably, first responders bravely put themselves in harm's way every day in service to our communities and country. What might surprise most people is that working in utility vegetation management can be even more dangerous.

Consider this statement by Dr. John Ball in his 2022 article "Tree Worker

Fraser in her March 2023 article "What are America's Most Dangerous Jobs?" these day-to-day threats place tree trimmers and pruners in the unenviable #1 spot on a list of the 25 deadliest jobs—ahead of commercial pilots, logging workers, and roofers.

Companies throughout the industry are combatting these sobering statistics with vigilant training, advanced personal protective equipment, and the integration of Human Operational Performance into safety practices. At Lewis Services, we've doubled down on our safety pledge and augmented our company-wide safety culture with an unyielding commitment to driver safety.

THE ROAD TO BEST-IN-CLASS SAFETY BEGINS BEHIND THE WHEEL

According to DOT Compliance Manager David Darnell, safety starts in the driver's seat. A retired law enforcement officer who served 30 years as a state trooper before joining Lewis Services, Darnell understands firsthand the ever-present risk factors that jeopardize driver safety. Darnell asserts that checking one's cell phone, switching radio stations, and exploring the many features of today's sophisticated navigation systems—even for a few seconds—can have dire consequences. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration corroborates Darnell's statement. The agency estimates that taking one's eyes off the road for five seconds (roughly the amount of time to scan a text) while traveling at 55 mph is equivalent to driving an entire football field with your eyes closed.

Even when companies like Lewis establish clear expectations and standards for their own drivers, vigilance

is still critical when it comes to monitoring other drivers on the road. In the past, impaired driving was typically seen at night and attributed to fatigue or alcohol. Today, with greater accessibility to substances such as CBD and prescription medications, impaired driving happens at all times of the day and is not confined to late hours.

In addition to driver behaviors, there are other safety challenges that are commonly reported in the vegetation management industry. UVM trucks are generally larger in size and operate in high traffic areas where navigation in crowded corridors can be challenging and pose risks. Poor weather conditions can also impact road safety—especially during storm response when crews may be traveling long distances in unfamiliar territories to support power restoration. Across the industry, companies are



Carlos Fernandez, Lead Foreman for Lewis in Connecticut

Safety Update by the Numbers: Another Us vs. Them: "... arboricultural operations are still among the leading industrial activities for fatal and nonfatal injuries. Compared to all industries, tree workers have at least 15 times the fatality rate (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2020a) and three times the nonfatal rate (BLS 2018)."

Daily risk factors contributing to these statistics include variability of work conditions, operating from heights, contact with electrified objects, and improper usage or failure to use proper safety equipment. According to Jayme



Past and present recipients of the Lewis Fleet Stewardship Award: (Left to right) Eric Newman, Mark Giannetto, Chad Fay, and Brian Fuegen

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continuously taking action to mitigate factors that might compromise road safety.

TRAINING AND TECHNOLOGY: FORCES FOR GOOD

Undoubtedly, technology can negatively impact driver safety when used improperly and unsafely. However, technological innovations designed to reinforce driver safety can create a positive impact when introduced properly and implemented with fidelity.

The most effective ways to improve driver safety often start before the driver gets behind the wheel. Experts like Darnell point to robust driver training programs, such as Smith5Keys, that provide operators with knowledge and skills that will help them in the most challenging driving conditions. Technology devices that monitor driver behavior using in-cab AI cameras and telematics are another way to leverage data for critical insights, real-time coaching, and ongoing training. These innovative systems can identify negative behavior events and provide immediate coaching, while also recognizing and

rewarding safe driving behaviors.

“Codrivers”—the additional in-cab occupants often traveling to and from jobsites with the drivers of Lewis vehicles—also participate in training and are as valuable to safe passage along roadways as are copilots in commercial air travel. The additional eyes, ears, and expertise provided by co-drivers increase situational awareness and provide another valuable level of safety.

EXPECT CONTINUED ADVANCEMENTS AND INNOVATION

Technology is ever evolving and getting exponentially better at a rapid pace. The use of AI dashcams that observe both in-cab and external events, coupled with real-time audible driver coaching alerts, is making significant headway in increasing driver safety. Lane assist sensors are becoming more standard in many vehicles, which can provide benefits to all who share the road. At the national level, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration continues to review speed limiters as a way to potentially reduce serious injuries and fatalities attributed to excessive speeds. And

data-driven insights and post-trip reports may be more commonly used to identify trends and predict safety gaps based on time of day, weather conditions, and driver experience.

The key to having a proactive approach is to embrace innovation. At Lewis, we are intentional in seeking out new driver safety technologies that will advance our Best-in-Class safety culture. We appreciate the collegial commitment to safety in the UVM sector and take advantage of opportunities to engage with peers in the fleet space to share ideas, experiences, and results. For companies who are just dipping their toes into advanced technologies, consider volunteering for product pilot testing to experience the latest innovations. And to those who are further down the path, consider sharing lessons learned so that others may benefit from your leadership.

As we continuously challenge ourselves to improve our respective driver safety programs, let's also challenge each other to embrace an industry-wide safety culture that makes the roads safer for all.



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Chad Fay

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chad Fay serves as Senior Vice President, Operations Support, for Lewis Services. In this role, Fay is responsible for the financial and operational management of multiple departments, including Safety, Fleet Operations, Supply Chain, and Project Management. A respected expert in the industry, Fay has served in

leadership positions across North America and successfully led teams through milestone processes, including the development and implementation of ESG initiatives, succession planning, and enterprise regulatory compliance. Recognized for his expertise in fleet safety, operational excellence, and asset utilization, Fay has served as a professional resource for industry publications and received numerous sector commendations.

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Saluting Branches and Safety: A Collective Effort

By Eric Campbell, Vice President, Saluting Branches

Since 2015, Saluting Branches has grown from a one-time civic project at Rainbow Treecare of Minnetonka, Minnesota, to a nationally recognized 501(c)(3) nonprofit with a singular mission: "We honor American service men and women by organizing volunteer tree and landscape care for the property dedicated to our veterans." The 2024 Day of Service included 95 locations across all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and Mexico, serving national cemeteries, state veterans' and municipal cemeteries, VA hospitals, soldiers' homes, monuments, amongst others. The efforts of 4,000 volunteers were supported, in turn, by the continued kindness and generosity of our industry sponsors and private donors.

The inherent hazards of the tree care industry—tools, equipment, climbing and rigging systems, proximity to public utilities and infrastructure, activity on roadways and subsequent interactions with vehicular traffic, the presence of the general public, and of course, the trees themselves—are more or less present at any given location during the Day of Service. Some factors are unique to this volunteer experience that must be considered.

It's with this collection of factors in mind that we approach the planning process for the annual event. For Saluting Branches, safety at any given site begins at the national level with the Day of Service Committee's enrollment and logistics teams, before broadening to involve the location's administrative offices, staff, site leadership teams, and volunteers. Within this network, safety decisions are layered—site and site leader selection, site visits, work and event planning, training, day-of preparations, and documentation all have a part in the process. This approach sets a solid foundation upon which a successful event can be built. However, it is open, timely communication amongst everyone involved in the planning process that ultimately leads to the safety experienced during the Day of Service.

IMPORTANCE OF SAFETY

We gather stories of the incidents that happen in our industry along the way. We hear them from our crews, coworkers, and colleagues. They come to us through extended networks and industry communications. With time, we add our own. From those that pass us by without leaving the scars of lasting implications, to those events that are tragic in their finality, it seems the stories have a way of collecting of their own accord.

The hazards we face in this line of work cannot be completely eliminated. We can, however, work to mitigate them. Diligence in identifying the hazards that are present, planning that manages our exposure to those hazards, and vigilance throughout the course of operations to ensure that mitigation evolves as developments occur allow us to manage risk. This process of identification, management, and reevaluation must be approached as a team. Safety is, then, an individual responsibility and a collective effort.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF SALUTING BRANCHES

Southern Maine Veterans Memorial Cemetery

DAY OF SERVICE

No matter the setting, a day of work is a day of work. The particulars may shift this way or that—hazards may be more or less present and the precautions that are taken in response are adjusted to match. While this is also true for Saluting Branches, special considerations emerge alongside those we typically navigate.

Protection of Property

Protecting property ranks as a top priority on many jobsites. Whatever it may be that's of value to our clients, we utilize the tools and techniques at our disposal to look after that which is entrusted to us. Through Saluting Branches and participation in the Day of Service, volunteers are asked to perform work that will have a lasting impact on and in places that carry extraordinary historical, national, and communal significance. This request is made with layers of responsibility that extend beyond the care of trees and landscapes, and includes the preservation of headstones, monuments, and markers. In some cases, these objects are physically irreplaceable, and damage of any degree has the potential to forever alter a place that has been set aside as hallowed ground.

Working with Others

Additionally, the communal nature of the Day of Service means that the work which we've volunteered for is often carried out in proximity to and, at times with, individuals and crews who may be unfamiliar. Given the kinetic nature of our work and the dynamic use of space during operations, the intermingling of crews can create an elevated need for communication. Depending upon the experience, proficiency, and communication style of those involved, this arrangement can present both opportunities and challenges that either benefit or complicate the overall effort. Our experience has been that working together has, with extremely rare exceptions, only served to benefit the efforts and experiences of our volunteers and the success of our events.

Working Within One's Limits

Like so many factors in this industry, working within one's limits



Minnesota State Veterans Cemetery



Minnesota State Veterans Cemetery

is a constraint that must be continually evaluated. This can be challenging as the externalities impacting our situations continually evolve. Members of our crews may call out sick, shifting team dynamics. Tools or equipment may be out of service, changing our capabilities. Time may grow short, creating a sense of urgency. Budgets have a way creating corners we would rather not cut, and our physical capabilities change over the course of a day, a week, and a career.

These are pressures that we work to remove from our volunteers' crews. Our Day of Service is not a production day, so there is no budget to meet. The "scope of work" is replaced with a list of projects that would be great to address, if possible, to do so. Risk-taking is discouraged, and "going big" does not have a place in the arc of the day. Rather, we encourage everyone to do what they can with what they have in the available time.

Perhaps the simplest way to frame this thought is to maintain awareness of the fact that this is a *Day of Service*—we gather to tend to places of remembrance, and in turn care for our neighbors and communities. We come together to give to those who have given, and to serve those who have served. Our work and our contributions are performed quietly so others may have their moments of peace and connection. With this motivation in place, choices become less complicated, and the best way forward becomes easier to see.

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING AHEAD: IMPROVING SAFETY FOR FUTURE EVENTS

Looking ahead to September and this year's annual event requires a look back at where we've come from. Each year has been one of growth, coming in many forms, such as increases in the number of volunteers and the sites they've served, geographic and demographic expansion, and the development of new relationships, both with those in the industry and those beyond it.

We expect this year will be no different. We are looking forward to welcoming more volunteers and to more sites. The work at the national level to support this growth remains several steps ahead and includes an ongoing effort to further improve how we provide for the safety of the people and protection of the places involved. To this end, we are reviewing



Fort Smith National Cemetery in Arkansas

how we have approached event safety in the past and are in the process of refining our enrollment and logistics processes. We are developing new protocols to ensure that appropriate preparations are made and are seeking input from others in the industry to expand our pre-event safety trainings.

Taking these steps to implement best practices during the Day of Service will undoubtedly create a safer day out for the Saluting Branches community. However, we also trust that this effort will play a part in raising general awareness for our industry as a whole and support the increased adoption of higher safety standards for working arborists throughout the year. What's more, we hope to further this same conversation with and amongst other volunteer-based arboricultural projects as they continue advancing their own planning processes.

REFLECTING ON THE LAST DECADE

Over the last decade, Saluting Branches has had the tremendous fortune to have gone without instances of

significant injury or property damage. This history of safety is a testament to the regard with which the safety standards that govern our industry are held, and it's a demonstration of the respect and care with which industry professionals across the country conduct their work. It is an honor to contribute toward the advancement of these standards and promote the culture of safety upon which we all rely.

If you'd like to learn more about Saluting Branches, please visit salutingbranches.org or email info@salutingbranches.org.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eric Campbell joined the Board of Directors in 2022, serving as Vice President, Day Of Service Committee Chair, and Site Leader for Saluting Branches. As the owner/operator of Two Rivers Tree Care and an ISA Certified Arborist and Tree Climber, Campbell brings significant expertise to the organization. Before joining Saluting Branches, he volunteered with the Military



Eric Campbell

Helpline and Veterans Crisis Line, blending his love for trees with his commitment to supporting veterans. Campbell introduced the event to a National Cemetery in Southern Oregon, finding deep satisfaction in contributing to a meaningful cause. He is honored to support Saluting Branches and its mission. 🌳

Save-the-Date

SALUTING BRANCHES' 11TH ANNUAL DAY OF SERVICE

Mark your calendars, the 2025 Saluting Branches Day of Service will be held Wednesday, September 17.

Registration for the event opens Memorial Day weekend. We look forward to seeing you in September!



Saluting Branches volunteers at the Stones River National Cemetery in Tennessee



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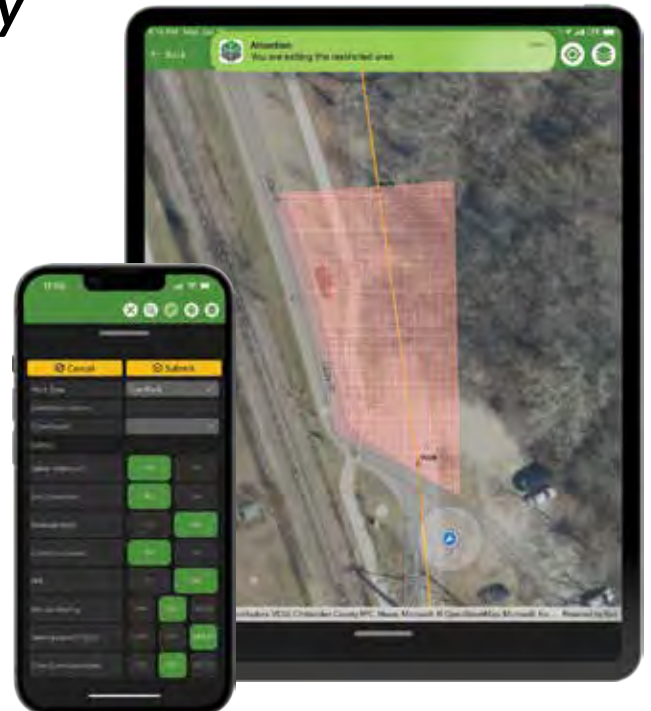
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SPOTLIGHT ON THE ENVIRONMENT



Herbicide Safety: The Importance of the Right Herbicide in the Right Place and Time

By Joshua Musgrove, Senior Consulting Utility Forester 1, ACRT Services

Herbicides first found commercial use after the end of the Second World War, where their introduction revolutionized the agricultural industry. Since then, herbicides of all kinds have been developed to solve a variety of different issues found at the intersection of humanity and the natural world.

Herbicides are often categorized according to their chemical structure, the mechanisms by which they impact plants, the appropriate timing of their use, and their method of application. Some herbicides are long-lasting while some can be exceptionally short-lived. Some impact a set of specific species and nothing else while others kill plants indiscriminately. Some herbicides can even be toxic to non-plant organisms, like wildlife and even humans.

Given their wide range of uses and their impacts, it is important to be sure that when herbicides are called for, the right kinds are chosen and applied using best practices. The focus of this article will highlight the potential negative impacts of improper herbicide selection, application, and maintenance.

The first issue is the effects to human health. Herbicides can exhibit both acute and chronic toxicity. Applying acutely toxic herbicides in situations where unprotected humans are present can lead to serious health issues, and in the worst case, death. The same issue can arise if an herbicide with chronic exposure toxicity and a high persistence—the length of time the herbicide is potent after application—is used in an area with regular human occupancy. Even though there will be no effects in the short-term, serious health consequences for humans could arise years or even decades later.

The second issue is the potential ecological effects of herbicide misuse. Improper herbicide selection, overapplication, and poor application timing can lead to serious and sometimes irreversible damage to the surrounding environment and ecosystem. An herbicide with too broad of species impact can lead to unintended

defoliation of the area, leading to serious impacts on the wildlife who use the plants for shelter and food. Some herbicides can also harm or kill present insect species as well as birds and mammals in the area, which can have far-reaching consequences for other uninvolved environments. Overapplication can also lead to herbicides being carried off-site by wind, rain, or organismal activity, damaging neighboring ecosystems, polluting groundwater, and leading to even further damage.

The fourth issue is mismatching the mechanism of action. Some species of plants respond strongly to photosynthesis-inhibiting herbicides while others only respond to amino acid disruption. Knowing which mechanism or combination of mechanisms will work best for your target species is crucial to efficiently curb problems and reduce overall usage of herbicides, which can cut down on unwanted environmental impacts.

The last issue is the concept of resistance. Much like the human body and disease, plants—and more importantly, target species—can develop a resistance to herbicides. According to Heap from www.weedscience.org, of the 31 known modes of herbicide action, weeds have been found to have developed resistance to 21 of them—over two-thirds! Resistance development is often attributed to overuse and overreliance on a single herbicide.

Herbicide usage can be quite a bit more complicated than it seems at first glance. This is why it is important to do all research necessary to safely and effectively utilize these vegetation management tools, and leave the application to trained professionals with an herbicide applicator license. Understanding the dangers and risks of herbicide usage can help protect both us as well as the world we live in for the future.

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A Culture of Learning Leads to a Culture of Safety

Safety is a long-standing, ever-evolving core value for every utility arborist. Since 2004, Davey has adopted contemporary strategies to enhance safety, including Human and Organizational Performance. HOP uses five principles to better understand the complex relationships between an organization's work, people, and systems. Trust and the emphasis on learning create the conditions for safety to emerge. These principles are:

- **Human error is normal.**
Organizations should understand how systems influence failure and success as opposed to focusing on individuals.
- **Context drives behavior.**
Understanding how work is done is critical to an organization's improvement.
- **Blame fixes nothing.** It's unhelpful and stifles organizational learning.

- **Learning is vital.** Learn constantly by acknowledging and committing to improving conditions.

- **Leadership response matters.**
Build trust for better relationships, promoting transparency which produces a willingness to share and learn from one another.

To promote these principles, Davey continues to innovate by providing tools that operationalize HOP at every level. Davey adopted the group learning strategy Learning Teams; the Learning Laboratory meets weekly with "new view" safety leaders in this field; organizational learning questions have jumpstarted conversations about work successes and potential latent conditions; and field studies are being conducted, discussed, and analyzed to understand these latent conditions.

"Having a variety of methods to learn from the workforce has helped keep us in a constant state of learning and improvement," said Davey HOP Program Manager Jon Schmidt. "It feels like we've cracked the code on proactive learning and reacting effectively post-event."

"Organizational leaders build trust by asking for help instead of constantly offering it," said Paul Hurysz, manager for Davey's Human Performance Safety Consulting Services. Davey's UVM service line recently tested the HOP concept under Paul's guidance. He anonymously surveyed employees, identifying where they thought their organization was on the Blame/Learn continuum. 71% of respondents felt their organization had a learning culture, which Hurysz attributes to trust-building leadership efforts and integrating HOP principles into daily activities. 🌱

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Key Electrical Safety Updates in ANSI Z133-2025: What Arborists Need to Know

By Hollis (Les) W. Day; Task Chair—Electrical Hazards Section, ANSI Z133; UAA Safety Committee Member; Safety Director, Mountain F. Enterprises, Inc.

Working around powerlines remains one of the most hazardous aspects of arboriculture, underscoring why understanding these revisions is vital. Even a momentary lapse in judgment or improper technique can lead to serious injury or death. With the release of ANSI Z133-2025, significant updates to Section 4—Electrical Hazards introduce new arborist qualification levels, updated Minimum Approach Distances (MADs), enhanced training protocols, and improved safety measures.

These changes align arboricultural safety practices with industry advancements, OSHA regulations, and real-world jobsite risks. Understanding these updates is crucial for all arborists, including residential, commercial, and utility line clearance arborists and vegetation management professionals, to comply with regulations, train, and, most importantly, save lives. This article explains the key updates to Section 4 of Electrical Hazards and their implications for your daily work.

New Electrical Arborist Qualification Levels

One of the most significant changes in the 2025 update is the introduction of four distinct Electrical Arborist levels. This change clarifies worker and employer responsibilities and ensures proper training before working near energized conductors.

These four distinct Electrical Arborist

levels refine how residential, commercial, and utility arborists work around energized lines. Level 1 Arborists are prohibited from working in proximity to any electrical hazard. In contrast, Levels 2 and 3 allow “incidental” work within proximity for those occasionally performing tasks near energized supply lines (up to specified voltage

thresholds). The fourth level covers utility line clearance arborists—qualified for all voltages—who work directly for or on behalf of the utility. This new framework clarifies worker and employer obligations in ensuring each arborist receives the proper training, maintains MADs, and follows safe work practices at each voltage tier.

Electrical Level 1 Arborist (Unqualified for any voltages)

- Electrical hazard awareness training is required. All arborists must receive training to recognize and avoid electrical hazards and prevent incidents and injuries.
- Strict MAD compliance is required. Level 1 Arborists must maintain full MAD clearance from any energized conductor and cannot enter the proximity zone of electrical equipment and supply lines under any circumstances.
- No incidental line clearance work allowed. Unlike higher-level arborists, Level 1 Arborists are not allowed to perform arboricultural activity within proximity to electrical supply lines.

Electrical Level 2 Arborist (Qualified for voltages of 750 V or less)

- Must be trained and qualified to perform arboricultural operations near secondary distribution lines.
- Must understand electrical hazards, direct and indirect contact risks, and MAD application and enforcement.
- Can prune, remove, and clear vegetation in proximity to electric supply lines of 750 V or less.

Electrical Level 3 Arborist (Qualified for voltages up to 35 kV)

- Trained, qualified, and authorized to perform arboricultural operations in proximity to secondary and primary distribution voltages.
- This work is typically done by a residential/commercial arborist working not on behalf of the utility that owns or controls the lines.
- Requires specific training in safe work practices, including induction hazards, step potential, and touch potential.
- Can climb and rig outside MADs and use insulated tools in proximity to electrical supply lines.
- Must demonstrate competency in arboricultural operations within proximity to electrical lines using insulated tools.

Electrical Level 4 Arborist-Line Clearance (Qualified for all voltages)

- Works on behalf of the utility or organization that controls or operates

the lines or equipment.

- Highest qualification level, allowing arborists to work within proximity of electrical supply lines during their daily work assignment.
- Requires extensive storm response training and stored high-energy risk mitigation (trees/electric supply lines under tension).

This tiered system ensures that all arborists receive training appropriate for their work assignments and potential voltage exposure level, reducing risks and better aligning with applicable OSHA regulations and industry best practices.

Strengthened Training and Competency Requirements

The 2025 revision increases employer responsibilities for worker competency and emergency preparedness.

Annual Competency Assessments added that employees must demonstrate competence before being qualified by the employer before working in a high-risk environment. And employers must conduct on-the-job assessments at least once per year thereafter.

Emergency Preparedness and Aerial Rescue includes new guidance on aerial rescue specific to electrical contact incidents. And the Annex F (Aerial Rescue Flowchart) of the Z133 provides a step-by-step guide for responding to electrocution emergencies.

Storm Work and Emergency Conditions includes that all downed electrical supply lines must be considered energized until the utility or organization that controls or operates the lines officially confirms de-energizing. Updated electrical hazard abatement protocols for storm response scenarios.

These updates emphasize real-world hazard recognition, specific training in safe work practices in the assigned task, demonstrated competency for qualification, and emergency response readiness.

Changes to Minimum Approach Distances

One of the most critical safety updates in Section 4 is the revision of MAD tables to improve clarity and compliance. The changes include the following:

- Updated MAD tables (Tables 1–4) to ensure each Electrical Level (1–4)

adheres to proper clearance distances.

- Special MAD considerations for insulated aerial devices, ladders, and equipment-mounted winches.
- New provisions for “step potential” and “touch potential” awareness in high-voltage areas. *Step Potential* is briefly defined as “the difference in electrical voltage between two points on the ground that can injure a worker on foot.” *Touch Potential* arises from contact with an energized object (e.g., a conductor or tree branch) while grounded.

Ensuring compliance with updated MADs reduces accidental contact incidents and aligns with OSHA and the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) best practices.

Recognizing RF Hazards in Utility Work

A new addition to Section 4 addresses radio frequency (RF) hazards from small cell antennas and other RF sources. New safety protocols include:

- All small cell sites will be treated as “active” until otherwise confirmed.
- Arborists must maintain proper clearance from RF antennas to avoid thermal exposure risks.
- Arborists must contact the site operator (the owner/controller of the RF antenna) before beginning work.

With more RF-emitting infrastructure installed on poles and transmission structures, arborists must be aware of potential health risks and interference with medical devices.

Expanding Responsibilities for Employers in Electrical Safety Compliance

The ANSI Z133-2025 revision strengthens employer responsibilities in ensuring that arborists working near energized conductors meet competency and training requirements before being assigned electrical work. This shift aligns with OSHA expectations and aims to reduce incidents caused by insufficient training or lack of hazard recognition.

One of the most notable additions in Section 4.5.9 states, “The employer shall ensure that the Electrical Level 4 Arborist has demonstrated competency in the



work practices involved before that arborist is considered as having completed the training required by this section.” This is intended to emphasize that training alone is not enough—an arborist must demonstrate competency through practical application, knowledge verification, and adherence to guidelines before being deemed fully qualified by the employer.

Key Employer Responsibilities Under ANSI Z133-2025

- Employers must ensure that arborists complete field demonstrations, knowledge assessments, and supervised experience before performing high-voltage work.
- Employers must regularly evaluate the skills of Electrical Level 2, 3, and 4 Arborists to ensure they continue to meet safety expectations.
- Employers should track and maintain records of training sessions, competency evaluations, and field verifications to demonstrate compliance with ANSI Z133 and applicable OSHA standards.
- Employers are responsible for ensuring that arborists understand and apply updated MADs based on their qualification level.

Final Takeaways and Next Steps

With the upcoming release of ANSI Z133-2025, arborists and vegetation management professionals must develop a plan to adapt to these updates. Here’s what to do next:

1. Review internal training programs to ensure compliance with Level 1-4 qualifications, as applicable.
2. Update Job Safety Briefings with new MADs, RF awareness, and hazard assessments.
3. Ensure annual competency evaluations for all arborists working in proximity powerlines.
4. Stay informed—visit www.isa-arbor.com for full ANSI Z133-2025 details.

By implementing these changes, arborists will be better prepared, protected, and better positioned to work safely around electrical infrastructure.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hollis (Les) W. Day is an experienced safety professional and industry leader in utility arboriculture. As the Task Chair for the Electrical Hazards section of the ANSI Z133 Committee, he has worked with industry experts to enhance electrical safety standards for arborists working near energized conductors. Day is an active member of the UAA Safety Committee and serves as the group’s blogger to educate and inform industry professionals on critical safety topics. As Safety Director for Mountain F. Enterprises, Inc., he applies practical experience and risk management expertise to ensure arborists and VM professionals have the tools and knowledge to work safely. With a career dedicated to training, operational safety, and improving industry standards, Day advocates for effective safety programs and workforce development in high-risk environments. 🌿



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WOMEN IN VM

Jamie McMillan

By Jamie McMillan, Associate Account Manager, NV5 Geospatial

The Women in Vegetation Management Committee hosts a workshop during the Trees & Utilities conference each year. Work to organize space, speakers, and an agenda happens all year long. I've had the privilege of serving as Chairperson for 2024-2025. Me. Jamie. An average gal who happens to work in the industry. I have no certifications, nor am I an arborist. I spend time in the woods, and I like talking with people—that's how I got here. Make no mistake, I am (thankfully!) surrounded by many women who are brilliant experts in the industry, but I'm also in the company of many women who are here because they like the work and choose to be here. That's perfect, too. Given the various ways people stumble across their career path, I feel that my story highlights the unconventionality of how someone lands in the world of vegetation management.

I've had a multitude of jobs. My first job out of college landed me in the State Health and Human Services department working as a case manager supporting families toward independence. It was emotional work, requiring a high degree of interpersonal skills. I worked with all sorts of people—ages, races, families, and education levels. I developed the ability to connect on important things, not what didn't matter. Most importantly, I learned not to judge a situation before real communication happens. Most of the time, I realized I didn't know half of what I thought I did! Ah, to be young again.

After that, I spent a few years as the primary caretaker of two dogs, two cats, and two kids under two (*Note to self: the title of my memoir*). To retain my sanity during those years, I worked a few nights a week doing makeup at the mall—now, that was a *fun* job. I learned tons about people and zilch about makeup. But when my babies started school, I had an opportunity to work in software development (*I know, right?*), and even though I was incredibly intimidated, I took it. I had to learn about things that seemed so foreign. Business requirements? Project management? Technical specs? I was a deer in the headlights. The only thing I had going for me was one skill: I felt comfortable asking questions and talking to people from all walks of life. Turns out, I was pretty good at taking complex ideas and explaining them in a simple way. I spent a decade doing project work, learning more about IT and software development than I ever imagined.

I eventually began to itch for more creative activities. Within the same healthcare company, I took a marketing

If you can't be a good example, then you'll just have to be a horrible warning.

CATHERINE AIRD

role in pharmacy. It was fast-paced, creative, and required so much attention to detail. Again, the skills that carried me through were the same—asking questions and talking with people about things that matter to them.

After a few years I decided I was ready for a client-facing role. I also started to think about what mattered to me and how I spent my time outside of work. I stumbled on an opportunity to work as an account manager for an environmental consulting company. When I say "stumbled," I mean I loudly complained to a friend over brunch mimosas that I was unsatisfied with my work, and she connected me with someone in the industry. I thought, *This is it!* I love being outside, I spend loads of time hiking. And trees? Yes, please! I spent a year convincing the company to hire me without industry experience.

That was six years ago. I have a hard time believing so much time has passed. About two years ago, I was hired as an account manager at NV5, where I hope to set up camp for a while. Make no mistake, it's hard, and I catch myself feeling intimidated sometimes. But that's growth—and growth hurts. But I hope I've encouraged you to get more involved with *your* industry. We are all just trying to find our way, so let's keep each other company as we do it! 🌿



Empowering Women in Vegetation Management: A Bold Step Forward

The intersection of Trees & Utilities is a space where precision, resilience, and strategic thinking are paramount. Within this industry, women continue to make their mark, demonstrating their expertise and leadership. Recognizing the importance of supporting and empowering women in this field, our committee has been working diligently to organize the upcoming **Trees & Utilities Women in Vegetation Management Workshop**, featuring the inspiring Michelle “MACE” Curran.

This workshop is proudly chaired by Jamie McMillan, with dedicated committee members Amanda Opp, Diona Neeser, Sara Dreiser, Maegan Mullinax, Elizabeth Murray, and Jodie Braskich. Their collective efforts over the last few years have made this workshop possible, ensuring it serves as an impactful and empowering experience for all attendees as well as an amazing kickoff to a great event.

Michelle Curran, better known by her call sign “MACE,” is a force to be reckoned with. She is a combat veteran and former U.S. Air Force fighter pilot, who soared through the skies as a member of the elite Thunderbirds, the Air Force’s premier demonstration squadron. But beyond her incredible aviation career, Curran has dedicated herself to a mission that resonates deeply with professionals in vegetation management: **helping individuals face their fears, conquer self-doubt, and step boldly into leadership roles**—whether in their careers or personal lives.

In her keynote presentation, “Flying Through Fear: How Vulnerability Fuels Success,” Curran will explore how embracing vulnerability can be a powerful driver of growth, confidence, and leadership. Her story—and the strategies she shares—will inspire attendees to own their journey, trust their voice, and lead with authenticity and boldness.

Championing Women in Vegetation Management

The Trees & Utilities Women in Vegetation Management Workshop is **a pioneering initiative aimed at providing women with the tools, connections, and confidence needed to thrive in a traditionally male-dominated industry**. This event is more than just a gathering; it’s a movement designed to foster mentorship, professional growth, and peer support.

Why Is This Important?

- **Representation matters.** Women in vegetation management often find themselves as one of the few—or even the only—females in their teams or organizations. This workshop seeks to change that by building a strong network of women who support and uplift each other.
- **Break barriers and face fears with confidence.** From managing right-of-way vegetation to ensuring the safe coexistence of trees and powerlines, the job requires technical expertise, leadership, and confidence—qualities that women in this space already possess but sometimes struggle to assert in a male-dominated field.
- **Encourage bold leadership in work and life.** Through



Michelle “MACE” Curran

interactive sessions and discussions, attendees will gain insights into how to step up, take risks, and own their expertise.

This event is more than just a workshop—it’s an opportunity to **invest in yourself and your career**. Whether you’re an industry veteran or just starting out, you’ll walk away with practical strategies, a supportive network, and renewed motivation to excel in vegetation management.

Our committee has designed this workshop to be interactive, engaging, and directly applicable to the real-world challenges women in vegetation management face. Key elements include:

- **Skill-Building Sessions:** Hands-on training and exercises designed to boost confidence and leadership skills to keep you growing!
- **Networking Opportunities:** A chance to connect with fellow women in vegetation management and establish meaningful professional relationships.

Join us as we take a significant step toward building a more inclusive, confident, and capable future for women in vegetation management. This is your moment to rise, lead, and make a lasting impact—just as Michelle “MACE” Curran has done in her extraordinary career. 🌱

WHERE PASSION AND COLLABORATION MEET

Rappahannock Electric Cooperative Day

By Cindy Devlin Musick, Senior Director of Vegetation Management, Rappahannock Electric Cooperative, and Paul Mitchell, Division Manager, Wright Tree Service

On May 22, 2025, more than one hundred arborists, utility foresters, contract foresters, safety professionals, management staff, and other industry professionals will gather in a park in Virginia for Rappahannock Electric Cooperative's Vegetation Management Day of Safety. Attendees will teach, discuss, question, network, eat, and—most importantly—learn. This annual event brings Rappahannock Electric Cooperative (REC) and its vegetation management contractors together to concentrate on safety in a collaborative environment. It is a simple premise that is yielding fantastic results.

Cindy Musick's perspective is:

Our vegetation management workers are the tip of the spear when it comes to outage restoration. They go first. Our annual Vegetation Management Day of Safety demonstrates our commitment to training, excellence, and learning from each other. It's one of our favorite days of the year.

This year, hundreds (maybe thousands) of years of experience from five unique companies will gather. Everyone will work together to invest in our most important shared resource: the teams performing the work in the field.

Some training topics will be presented to the entire

group. For other topics, we will utilize breakout groups. Each vegetation vendor will provide the training and trainers for a specific topic. Each group visits each training station, ensuring each trainer delivers the message to the entire REC vegetation management team. On this day, the "color of their shirt" doesn't matter.

All vendors have the opportunity to participate in all three stages of building the event. This ensures the subjects are relevant and well presented to all attendees. The presenters encourage questions, ideas, and feedback from each group. Informative and interactive sessions on driver safety, hands-on chainsaw safety, and a live wire demo are typically popular and engaging sessions on our agenda.

The desire to keep great people going home safely to their friends and family every day is the *why* behind the passion. That *why* is the fuel that drives REC to pay the field teams to come together and learn. The *why* energizes each company to plan and execute the event. The *why* invigorates the fantastic trainers to teach at each station. There is a special camaraderie vibrating across the group all day. You can hear it in the questions asked. You can see it with the open cross-company conversations.



of Safety

Paul Mitchell's why is:

Before I settled into my current position, I spent seven remarkable years as a safety supervisor in vegetation management. I met thousands of people like me, trying to provide for their families. Like them, I wanted to get home to my family safe and sound. Like them, I wanted my teammates to go home to their families safe and sound. This is where my *why* started to take shape. It hit another gear seven years ago, when I was asked whether I would let my son work in vegetation management. I had to pause before answering that question. Let me say that again: *I had to pause before answering.* That's when I knew I needed to do more. Events like REC's Day of Safety are opportunities for me to do more. Our industry has come a long way since my first day on the job in July of 1992, and I know we still have further to go. My son is starting his third safe year with Wright Tree Service.

This event requires substantial work in organization, planning, and execution, so the returns must go beyond that investment. How do we know if our passion and collaboration have been successful? Here are some of the key returns we are proud to tie back to this initiative:

- **Low Incident Rates**—Wright Tree Service is entering its third year working on REC property with only one OSHA recordable.
- **Employee Retention**—Many event attendees have worked on REC property for 10+ years. Nearly 10% of Wright Tree Service's current employees on REC property fall into this category.
- **Empowerment**—Although this can't be quantified, it is the energy we feel all day.
- **Stronger Culture**—We all talk about how important a culture of safety is. This day helps create and/or advance safety culture for all teams. With the free exchange of thoughts, ideas, experiences, and questions, all attendees will leave knowing that safety isn't just a value written on a website. On this day, we demonstrate to one another that safety is a shared priority and a value we should all respect and strive for.

Safety is a core value for Rappahannock Electric Cooperative—as it is for so many in our industry, including Wright Tree Service. The REC Day of Safety is a way to immerse the utility and its contractor partners with experts. For one day, safety is the sole focus. Whether it's pouring down rain or the sun is shining, it's a great, great day. 🌲

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Exploring the Past, Present, and Future UVM Safety on Trees & Lines

"Really, the new view on safety or Safety Differently, it's creating situations for good things to happen, not preventing bad things," Tim Walsh, vice president of Safety and Training at The Townsend Company (and former UAA President), explained on a recent episode of the *Trees & Lines* podcast. "It's making sure we've trained people, we've given them the right equipment, we've supported them."

From fostering a culture of learning to implementing the latest safety protocols, *Trees & Lines* is bringing the safety conversation to the forefront. Hosts Tej Singh (Iapetus Infrastructure Services COO) and Phil Charlton (UVM veteran) regularly engage with industry thought leaders on critical safety topics, including training, risk mitigation, and the evolution of best practices.

When Jim Beery, senior safety lead at Wright Tree Service, joined the podcast, he talked about the benefits of shifting from Safety-I to Safety-II. "Eliminating blame for error—because we all make mistakes—means that if we allow [workers] to make those errors while they're becoming experts in their field and not blaming them, suspending them, and all those sorts of things, they'll begin to speak up more and more," Beery reasoned.

Through meaningful discussions with top safety minds like Walsh, Berry, and many others, *Trees & Lines* provides a platform for sharing strategies that enhance safety in the field. Whether it's examining the ANSI Z133 Safety Standard, learning from past incidents, or integrating new technologies, these conversations are shaping the future of safety in UVM. 🌲



Follow *Trees & Lines* on LinkedIn to make sure you don't miss out on these valuable safety insights!

Icing Out the Heat: Strategies for Urban Forestry Crew Safety

By Michelle Sutton, Editor, City TREES

Reprinted with permission from City TREES, the magazine of the Urban and Community Forestry Society (UCFS).

I spoke to Athens-Clarke County, Georgia Community Forestry Coordinator Mateo Fennell on August 15, 2023, when the temperature was 83°F (28.3°C) with 81% humidity and a heat index of 91°F (32.8°C). Plenty hot—but the day before had seen 91°F (32.8°C) and a heat index of 110°F (43.3°C). On that day prior to our conversation, Fennell's home AC had failed, so the unrelenting heat—always on his mind when it comes to his crew—was looming large for his family as well.

Themes that emerged with Fennell were oft-repeated as I spoke to more urban foresters in Georgia (thank you to Georgia Forestry Commission Urban and Community Forestry Coordinator Seth Hawkins for the leads), and to folks in Louisiana and Texas, two states experiencing the nation's worst heat at the time.

In the Athens-Clarke County unified government, community forestry falls under the Landscape Management Division, with working hours from 7 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. On ultra-hot days like August 14, the crew starts outdoor work right at 7 a.m. and holds safety meetings and does indoor work for the afternoon hours.

Like crews everywhere, Fennell's crews take 10-gallon coolers out on city trucks, with water and Gatorade. Fennell said, "We have a freezer full of ice pops; it's pretty delightful seeing grown men eating ice pops when they're back on lunch break; they are very popular. We also have a big ice machine here at the shop."

Our administration is looking into getting misting fans to give away."

Fennell has his own experience contending with the heat. "I grew up in Saudi Arabia and everyone there wears long sleeves—generally linen, a breathable fabric," Fennell said. "Wearing long sleeves to most people here seems like a bad idea, but it does





DEVELOPING A LEARNING CULTURE

DRG believes that a Human and Organizational Performance (HOP) philosophy creates a new pathway to safety and organizational performance.

When HOP concepts and principles are utilized, employees are engaged in a systematic way to produce repeatable outcomes that deliver continuous improvements to organizational safety, quality and productivity.

To learn more about HOP and system-thinking that produces repeatable outcomes and organizational resilience, contact Paul Hurysz at Paul.Hurysz@davey.com



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Fennell says that when he was working as a field arborist, he had three main strategies for keeping cool. First, sun hoodies, which are long-sleeve shirts made of moisture-wicking, lightweight material and have an attached hood. “They’re phenomenal, and I still wear those,” Fennell said.

Second, he’d use a water reservoir on his back—like the bladders that bicyclists use—that he would fill with ice; it would perform like a cooling vest. Third, he perfected his water game. “I’d freeze a gallon jug half full of water the night before, then in the morning I would fill to

the top with water,” he said. “That ratio would keep the water cold all day and melting at just the right rate.” (Freezing the whole jug of water meant it would remain too solid to be useful throughout the day.)

Macon-Bibb County, Georgia Forester and Parks and Beautification Director Michael Glisson recommends holding heat stress training for the tree crew in mid-spring to early summer to ensure the guidance is fresh in folks’ minds just as the worst of the heat sets in. Glisson’s department has a Heat Index Policy: if the Heat Index is above 100°F (37.8°C), the crew leaders will say, “We’re going to practice ‘1-and-10’ today,” meaning everyone can take a 10-minute break after each hour of work. “They aren’t required to, but they are encouraged to,” Glisson said. “The trucks are air-conditioned and if the AC fails, the vehicle goes immediately to the shop—we don’t mess around with that.”

Glisson’s crew starts early (6 a.m.) and switches to indoor work for the afternoon during heat waves. “The crew members are encouraged to refill the coolers at any county building—and to cool off at any county building, including recreation centers and fire stations,” Glisson said. In addition, he orders the crew sun hoodies and cooling towels that can be wetted and wrapped around the neck.

I asked Glisson about acclimatization for folks who aren’t used to working in the heat or are returning after time away from it. He said, “I’ve been thinking more and more about that. With new guys, when we look at their resume and see they don’t have experience with outdoor work, we’re very clear about ‘Hey, take a break when you need to—and if you feel like you’re being pushed too hard, let us know. We want you to enjoy your job. We don’t want to work you into the ground and have you quit.’”

While Georgia’s 2023 heat wave was hot and wet, in Louisiana and Texas, it was hot and dry. Alexandria, Louisiana Landscape Architect and Urban Forester Darren Green doesn’t have in-house crews, but said, “I hear constantly from my contractors (arborist and landscape) that they have to start earlier, quit earlier, and go slower. They’re not getting as

much done. The extreme heat index makes your brain foggy; you lose your sharpness.”

Adding to that—Green said that, as of the day we spoke (August 21, 2023), Alexandria hadn’t had rain in an entire month, putting extraordinary stress on trees and other plants. Green says that Alexandria, in the center of Louisiana, had a record-breaking 22 consecutive days over 100°F (37.8°C), from July 25 to August 15, 2023. It reached 110°F (43.3°C) on two of those days, the hottest in the city’s history of keeping records. When you factored in the humidity, the heat index was 115°F (46.1°C) or greater, resulting in an extreme heat warning. “At 115°F heat index with 85% humidity, you can’t physically drink enough water,” Green said.

Like Green, San Antonio, Texas City Forester Michael Holinsky, who works out of the Urban Forestry Division of the Parks and Recreation Department, has stories to tell. He is Canadian and came to San Antonio in 2021 after serving as Halifax, Nova Scotia City Forester. As such, he brings an interesting perspective on weather extremes.

“In Canada, it can be very uncomfortable all year—too hot or cold, and the weather fluctuates—you can’t acclimate in a meaningful way,” Holinsky said. “Here, San Antonians acclimate because it’s so hot for so long, especially for those who are working in it every day, like our crews.” That said, the heat in the summer of 2023 set records, and the hot/dry combination has been devastating to the city’s trees, according to Holinsky.

San Antonio’s tree crew starts work at 6:30 a.m. “We brief our crews every morning about the heat stress potential for that day and remind everyone that it’s important to take work slower and stop frequently for water breaks,” Holinsky said.

Normally the city has a no-idling policy, but when the weather goes above 100°F (37.8°C), staff may need to escape to a cool area, like trucks with AC. Holinsky and colleagues also do training at least twice a year on things like what to look out for in a colleague that indicates impending heat stress. “We try to empower the employee to pay attention to their needs and to let their crew leaders know when they need a break,”



At ucfsociety.org/keeping-workers-safe-in-extreme-heat, you can see a superb Heat Stress Risk Assessment from Surrey, British Columbia, and an excellent example of a Heat Safety Bulletin from Portland, Oregon, as part of its Heat Illness Prevention Plan. Unlike tree crew members in San Antonio, Texas, for example, outdoor workers in more temperate places like Surrey and Portland are, in general, less likely to be acclimatized to extreme heat events. A formal plan can be a good safety strategy for coping with those intermittent events.



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Holinsky said. "They know they will be supported." The City of San Antonio also provides cooling towels; some staff put them under their hats or helmets when they're on break.

Holinsky points out that the need for accommodation isn't just about temperature. "If it's 85°F (29.4°C) and someone's doing an arduous task in the blistering sun, like working with a chain saw on a complex tree removal or hauling large material, you have to be as careful as someone doing something less arduous work in 110°F (43.3°C) degrees," he said. "During heat waves, heavy lifting work gets done here in the morning, then by the afternoon crews are focused on less arduous tasks like cleaning vehicles out, organizing the depot area, cleaning tools, or attending to requests for smaller fallen branch removal."

To cover up or not? Holinsky says that depends. "We get both periods of dry heat and wet/humid heat; if it's dry heat, covering up to protect yourself from the sun makes sense, but if it's a wet/humid heat, you won't feel comfortable being covered up. I find that what works for people depends on the nature of the heat." 🌳

Tree crew at work in the summer in the City of Upper Arlington, Ohio.



PHOTO BY STEVE COTHEL

PHOTO BY AMITAVA SARKAR



Working at night would be cooler but would pose safety challenges. This photo comes from a fabulous performance piece "The Trees of Govalle," featured in the July/August 2015 issue of City TREES; the story is viewable in the Archived Issues section at ucfsociety.org/city-trees. More than 2,000 people attended this event in the Govalle neighborhood of Austin, Texas.

Former UCFS Board Member and City of Coral Springs, Florida Environmental Program Manager (in the Public Works Department) Claudia Alzate explained that most of the landscape and tree work she oversees is handled by contractors. "So I really haven't had a lot of input on what they do internally to handle the high temperatures and meet the (sometimes tight) deadlines I give them," she said. "In our city, we have a noise ordinance that prohibits work before 9 a.m.; some of the vendors have asked me for permission to start work earlier, so I allow them to do that in commercial areas. Also, work in roadways on weekends is not allowed, but I've been letting them work on secondary roads some Saturday mornings (if requested)."



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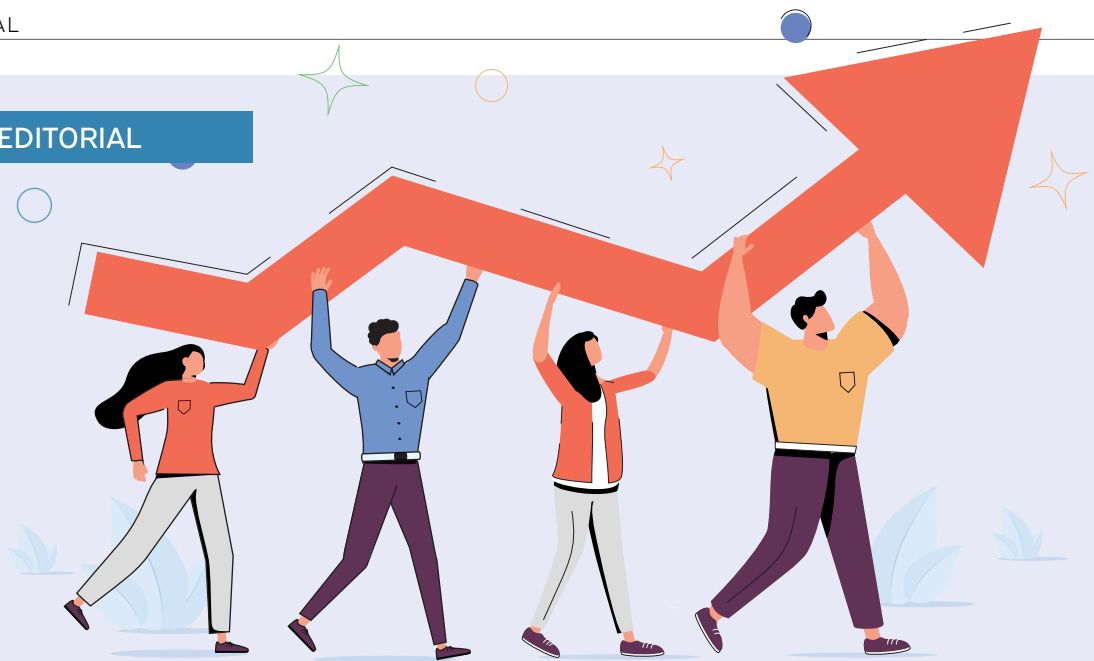
The UAA and ROW Steering Committee are looking forward to bringing the event back to Canada in 2026 for another spectacular international event.

This series has been held every three to four years since the early '70s and has consistently been one of the greatest environmental research-based conferences to attend and we are excited to be coming to Vancouver, British Columbia in May of 2026.

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OPINION EDITORIAL

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Human Organizational Performance: Better than New

By Randall H. Miller, Director of Research and Development, Eocene Environmental Group

I first learned of a new perspective on safety in Syracuse, New York, in 2018 from Beth Lay, who was then at Lewis Tree Service. She stressed focusing on ensuring good things happen rather than preventing bad things. The ideas weren't original to her, but she was the first I heard apply them to utility arboriculture. It's often called "Safety Differently" or "Safety-II." The concept is proactive. It acknowledges that people make mistakes—and rather than emphasizing punishment, it focuses on learning from those mistakes. It's gaining acceptance because it's effective, and it's here to stay.

The terms "Safety Differently" or "Safety-II" won't make sense five or ten years from now when the system is commonplace. If we keep using our current terms, it will sow confusion as people will wonder, "Different from what?" and "What was Safety-I?" We need language that will serve us in the future. As James Beery describes, the emerging term is Human Organizational Performance (HOP). This name better describes the intention of the model, and advances its value beyond being different or new.

Different from What?

"Safety-I" is behavior-based and originated in the 1930s with Herbert Heinrich. Heinrich determined that 88% of industrial accidents (his term) were due to unsafe acts, and the remainder

to unsafe conditions. He concluded that there was a correlation between the number of close calls and minor injuries on one hand, and serious injuries or fatalities on the other. He determined there were scores of minor injuries, hundreds of close calls, and thousands of unsafe acts for every serious event. Heinrich argued that a person who suffers a disabling injury had an average of 300 close calls due to the same unsafe act that resulted in their injury. From his perspective, the best way to prevent serious or fatal accidents is to eliminate unsafe actions and conditions (Heinrich et al. 1980).

Heinrich's theory has been accepted for decades, but it has its problems. Tim Walsh (2025) informs us that it isn't true that there is correlation between number of minor incidents and serious injuries or fatalities. Further, Heinrich's research was performed 90 years ago in factories; the modern arboricultural workplace is dynamic and far more complex than a factory floor where actions are repetitive. Even worse, Heinrich's theories have been abused by managers who justify blaming victims for their injuries. They reason that if someone has been hurt on the job, it is conclusive proof that they have been habitually violating safety rules. They consider workers to be the problem—and their solution is punishment.

Human Organizational Performance

As James Beery points out in his fine contribution to this safety issue, titled "Challenges and Wins in the Application of Human and Organizational Performance," champions of HOP argue that punishing people for workplace incidents is counterproductive. Agnew and Daniels (2010) observe, "The idea that a charged or convicted practitioner will scare others into behaving more prudently is probably misguided; instead practitioners will become more careful only in disclosing what they have done" (p. 66).

Ted Conklin agrees. In *The 5 Principles of Human Performance* (2019), he observes, "For a long time, we thought the problem was our mistake prone and uncontrolled workforce. If we wanted safety to improve, we would [sic] simply needed to fix each worker, one at a time, until all workers conducted work safely" (p. 17). He argues that demanding someone not do something they didn't intend to do in the first place in the expectation they will not do it again, is not a rational basis for a safety program.

For Conklin, Beth Lay, James Beery, and others, we have two choices: we can get better or we can get even. A central tenet of HOP is that people make mistakes—that's part of the human condition. The only way to prevent incidents from occurring is to learn

from our mistakes and shift our focus away from the traditional blame-and-punish model.

The idea is to build trust, seek advice from the workforce before incidents occur, and provide them the opportunity to identify and offer solutions to problems before they materialize into safety events. That doesn't mean we shouldn't investigate. However, those investigations should be done in the spirit of learning. Tim Walsh (2025) warns against hindsight bias. Hindsight bias describes the tendency of investigators to simplify circumstances that led to an event, and conclude the subject incident ought to have been anticipated and prevented (Cook et al. 1998). We need to be aware of our penchant for hindsight bias and not default to easy explanations, which lead to blame and suppress learning opportunities.

This doesn't mean people get a pass for willful rule violations. However, we should assume our employees want to do the right thing and take

the opportunity to learn from their experiences rather than assume they are incompetent, and are punished by default. Rather, we should trust our workers until they prove they can't be trusted, and only then resort to punishment.

Conclusion

HOP requires work and leadership. It creates a culture of trust from which learning takes place. Such learning leads to preventing events rather than our traditional way of reacting, of leveling blame and meting out punishment, which is largely ineffective after a point. It requires accepting mistakes and distinguishing them from violations. It is inclusive rather than authoritarian. Its principles are rightly gaining acceptance and are here to stay. They soon won't be new or different. That is why Jim Beery, Tim Walsh, Beth Lay, and other progressive safety professionals advise us to use the term Human Organizational Performance—so, HOP to it.

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