Companion Volume User Guide: Fell Trees Manually

FWP Forest and Wood Products
Training Package
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Skills Insight

Contents

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Introduction

About this Guide

This user guide is designed to assist Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) in effectively delivering training for manual tree felling. The guide covers several important aspects, addressing specific challenges and recommendations for enhancing training quality.

The units covered in this guide are:

- FWPCOT2275 Fell trees manually (basic)
- FWPCOT3350 Fell trees manually (intermediate)
- FWPCOT3351 Fell trees manually (advanced)

Structure of this Guide

Section 1 highlights the challenges of limited tree availability for training purposes due to environmental considerations and heritage protection.

Section 2 provides recommendations on pre-existing skills and knowledge requirements for trainees before enrolling in manual tree felling units for safe and effective training.

Section 3 emphasises the importance of documented risk assessments and processes in tree felling, a requirement also detailed in the units of competency.

Section 4 focusses on the importance of record-keeping for trainees to document their progression and accumulating experience throughout the training program as an essential tool for skills assessment.

Section 5 suggests the practice of documenting an 'Assessment Decision Summary', which enables assessors to provide evidence and demonstrate the rationale behind their decisions concerning a trainee's competency.

Section 6 explores the use of simulated training environments before progressing to training practice and assessment sessions on cutting actual trees cutting in real-world scenarios to help improve efficiency in using trees.

Section 7 details methods for collecting performance evidence from the workplace for enabling efficient use of existing workplace infrastructures, including trees that have been earmarked for felling, thus optimising the use of tree resources.

Section 8 identifies approaches and benefits of forming strategic partnerships with relevant stakeholders for tree allocation to alleviate the issue of limited tree availability for training purposes.

Section 9 outlines industry-recommended age limit for enrolment in the manual tree felling units.

Section 10 provides links to useful training resources.

Section 1: RTO Implementation Issue – Limited Availability of Trees for Training and Skills Assessment

The practice of using a chainsaw to fell trees serves as a fundamental competency across a range of sectors, including forestry operations, agriculture, and arboriculture. This skill is not only used in routine activities but also essential during emergency events such as storms, cyclones, and bushfires.

However, the availability of trees for training and assessing skills in manual tree felling has become increasingly constrained. Strict policies imposed by various organisations and governmental bodies, often due to environmental considerations and heritage protection, limit the felling of non-hazardous trees. These restrictions have created a challenging landscape for RTOs and the acquisition and practice of essential chainsaw tree felling skills.

To adapt to the constraints imposed by the availability of trees suitable for chainsaw felling training, RTOs may consider implementing a multi-faceted approach to sustain the quality of their programs.

One effective strategy is the utilisation of simulated training environments for initial practice, complemented by hands-on exercises on actual trees to offer trainees exposure to real-world scenarios. This blended training model offers a comprehensive, safe and sustainable learning experience.

In addition, integrating evidence of performance gathered from workplace activities into the training and assessment framework can enable efficient use of existing workplace infrastructures, optimising the use of tree resources

It is also advisable for training organisations to establish collaborative relationships with relevant agencies, such as forestry organisation and government bodies, to identify specific trees that can be responsibly used for training purposes.

The exploration of simulator-based training could also serve as an invaluable supplementary tool, enriching traditional methods and providing a more scalable and sustainable training model.

By employing these varied approaches, training providers can better navigate existing restrictions while maintaining the highest standards of instruction. Further guidelines are detailed in the subsequent sections.

Section 2: Pre-Existing Skills and Knowledge Recommendations

The introduction of prerequisite units for tree felling trainees emerged as a significant safety measure proposed by industry to ensure trainees embark on their training already equipped with essential skills and knowledge to support a safe training and assessment process.

After extensive discussions and a rigorous review of the potential options for prerequisite units, it was determined that none of the available options are compliant with the Training Package Organising Framework.

As an alternative, the industry agreed to recommend the following, emphasising the value of prior experience:

- Fell trees manually (basic): Individuals who seek to undertake this unit must have prior skills and knowledge in the safe startup, shutdown, maintenance, and operations of a chainsaw to ensure their own safety and uphold the training provider' responsibility for safety.

- Fell trees manually (intermediate): Individuals who seek to undertake this unit must have prior skills and knowledge in safely starting up, shutting down, maintaining, and performing basic operations such as trimming, cross-cutting and basic tree felling with a chainsaw to ensure their own safety and uphold the training provider' responsibility for safety.

- Fell trees manually (advanced): Individuals who seek to undertake this unit must have prior skills and knowledge in safely conducting intermediate tree felling operations using a chainsaw to ensure their own safety and uphold the training provider' responsibility for safety.

The industry not only strongly recommends but expects that individuals enrolling in any of the tree felling units have pre-existing skills and knowledge of chainsaw operation specific to tree felling and associated risk level. This ensures they approach the training with the requisite safety awareness and competence necessary for each skill level: basic, intermediate and advanced. Training providers are recommended to implement the structured sequence of skills and knowledge outlined in Table 1, verifying prospective trainees' completion of the respective course before allowing enrolment in tree felling units.

Table 1: Sequence of Recommended Skills and Knowledge Verification for Prospective Tree Felling Trainees

Tree felling unit	Recommended skills and knowledge before enrolment*
FWPCOT2275 Fell trees manually (basic)	Completion of any of the following units: - AHCMOM213 Operate and maintain chainsaws - FWPCOT2256 Trim and cut felled trees, or - FWPHAR2209 Trim and cut harvested trees
FWPCOT3350 Fell trees manually (intermediate)	Completion of FWPCOT2275 Fell trees manually (basic), or

	Completion of any of the following units: • AHCMOM213 Operate and maintain chainsaws • FWPCOT2256 Trim and cut felled trees, or • FWPHAR2209 Trim and cut harvested trees
FWPCOT3351 Fell trees manually (advanced)	Completion of FWPCOT3350 Fell trees manually (intermediate

* This includes the current versions of the listed units or their predecessors.

If an individual has acquired knowledge and skills corresponding to those listed in Table 1 through informal learning or coaching, they could undertake a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) or Recognition of Current Competency (RCC) process. This can be done either within the enrolment in a qualification or before enrolling in the tree felling unit, to assess the equivalency of their skill level.

It is important to understand that this recommendation does not establish a compliance element to training delivery. Instead, it provides guidelines that underscore the importance of safety and the responsibility for safety of training providers. It entrusts training providers with the responsibility to consider prior skills and integrate it into their risk assessment processes. In essence, this becomes a risk assessment responsibility.

Section 3: Documented Risk Assessments in Tree Felling

The units of competency for tree felling stipulate that skills assessments must include evidence demonstrating that the trainee has conducted a risk assessment for all the trees to be felled. Additionally, it is required that the trainee documents a risk assessment for at least one tree that has been felled. This documentation must detail localised hazards and risks associated with tree felling and specify methods to minimise these risks.

Although the units require assessment evidence for documented risk assessment for at least one felled tree, it is a fundamental requirement of legislative compliance that a feller possesses the ability to identify hazards, assess risks, and implement appropriate risk control measures for each task.

For a training organisation responsible for managing and controlling the site, it is advisable to establish a documented process to demonstrate to the satisfaction of a regulator attending an incident and a court that it has fulfilled its obligations under the relevant Occupational Health and Safety/Work Health and Safety Act. This process should encompass a Safe Work Method Statement/Standard Operating Procedure (SWMS/SOP) for each task, which may be generic to the work being performed. Additionally, it should include documented comprehensive risk assessments for all felled trees, considering the environment and conditions that could affect the work being carried out.

Section 4: Guidelines for Trainee Record-Keeping

Note: The recommendation in this section is intended to complement, not replace, the existing requirements of the Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs).

In consideration of safety and potential legal implications that an assessor might face in the event of serious injuries sustained by a tree felling operator, the industry underscores the significance of extensive training before the assessment takes place.

It is recommended that the training process encompass a thorough evaluation of the trainee's entire learning journey and their invested efforts up to the point of assessment test. This evaluation should inform the trainer and assessor's decision regarding the trainee's readiness to undertake the assessment test.

To support this comprehensive evaluation, industry recommends that trainers and trainees in tree felling diligently maintain a 'Logbook of Trees' throughout their training. This logbook serves as a comprehensive record, documenting each trainee's progression and accumulating experience throughout the training program.

The method for maintaining trainee records should encompass structured training sessions, followed by periods dedicated to practical tree felling activities. During these practical sessions, trainees should be mentored and supervised by experienced professionals such as lead trainers or qualified supervisors, ideally proficient in Training and Assessment. These mentors are responsible for guiding the trainees, ensuring they acquire the necessary skills and knowledge.

The logbook should record the number of trees felled by each trainee, detailing the characteristics of these trees and cutting techniques employed. These records should be signed off by the supervisor at the time of logging. The training sessions and logging process should be conducted over a set period of time, ensuring that it is neither excessively lengthy nor unduly brief.

Section 5: Implementing a 'Decision Summary' in the Assessment Process

Note: The recommendation in this section is intended to complement, not replace, the existing requirements of the Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs).

Industry acknowledges the crucial role of assessment documentation, particularly in the context of a review or legal investigation. It is recommended that assessors should be able to provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate how they arrived at their decision regarding a trainee's competency. In this regard, a 'Logbook of Trees' for trainee record-keeping could be a useful tool.

Assessors are also advised to incorporate an 'Assessment Decision Summary' in their assessment protocols. This summary should concisely capture the evidence and considerations that underpin the assessor's judgments regarding trainee competencies.

The 'Assessment Decision Summary' enables assessors to provide evidence and demonstrate the rationale behind their decisions concerning a trainee's competency. Such documentation is critically important, especially in situations where the assessment process may be scrutinised during a Workplace Health and Safety review or subjected to a legal investigation. Insufficient or absent documentation may hinder the ability to provide a comprehensive and defensible account of the assessment process undertaken.

Section 6: Application of Simulated Training Environments

Industry recommends the implementation of simulated training environments for preliminary practice in chainsaw tree felling cutting techniques to help improve efficiency in using trees. This should be complemented by training practice and assessment sessions on actual trees, which adhere to the performance criteria outlined in the unit of competency, to ensure trainees gain valuable experience in real-world scenarios.

Methods:

To facilitate practice within simulated training environments, two methods are proposed:

- Utilise vertically secured short or long/high logs, also known as "totem poles" or "practice stumps", to simulate the conditions of a standing tree
- Strap sections of logs to field stumps to mimic the conditions of felling a real tree.

Benefits:

The adoption of these simulated training environments offers multiple advantages:

- Provides a cost-efficient and safe training method for beginner trainees, imparting valuable training to participants before progressing training on real trees
- Allows trainees to practice multiple cuts on a single log, thereby conserving the number of trees required for training
- Minimises the risk of error when trainees transition to felling real trees, contributing to sustainable tree management practices.

Section 7: Workplace-Based Evidence Collection

Industry recommends incorporating evidence of performance collected from the workplace into the assessment process for manual tree felling units. This evidence can be gathered either through direct observations by the assessor or a third-party, specifically a workplace supervisor.

Under the guidelines of the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA)[1], the responsibility for assessment outcomes or decisions remains with the RTO assessor. These outcomes or decisions must be made by individuals who hold the necessary trainer and assessor credentials, as required by the current Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs).

However, under a supervision arrangement with the RTO, workplace supervisors can participate in workplace training and assessment processes without needing a trainer and assessor credential. The activities in which a workplace supervisor can be involved in include:

- Providing advice and practical support to individuals
- Advising on the progress of individuals
- Assisting in the collection of evidence for assessment
- Participating in assessment judgements by working alongside a qualified assessor to conduct assessment.

When involving a third-party to collect evidence that will contribute to a pool of assessment evidence, the following recommendations are strongly advised:

- A competency judgement should not be made without some evidence that has been actively or directly assessed or overseen by the assessor.
- The third party should be a suitably qualified workplace supervisor or industry expert.

Suitably Qualified Workplace Supervisor

To ensure the highest standards of safety and competency in manual tree felling, a trainee undergoing training and/or assessment in the workplace should be supervised by a suitably qualified individual who is an employee of the same employer.

A qualified supervisor should hold an equivalent or higher-level "fell tree manually" unit, and possess current skills and knowledge, along with on-the-job experience.

Methods

Two methods are proposed for collecting performance evidence from the workplace:

- Direct observation of the trainee in the workplace by the assessor, either in person or through live digital video technology. The use of digital technology is especially useful in remote locations where the physical presence of a trainer and/or assessor may be impractical.
- The use of a third-party, specifically a suitably qualified supervisor, to gather workplace evidence. This may include video recordings and/or observations that document the trainee's skill and knowledge in action.

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[1] https://www.asqa.gov.au/rto/focus-compliance/series-1-trainers-and-assessors/chapter-4

Benefits

- Enables efficient use of existing workplace infrastructures, including trees that have been earmarked for felling, thus optimising the use of tree resources,
- Enhances assessor confidence in the trainee's acquisition of skills.

Additional Notes

While the units of competency for tree felling do not specify mandatory workplace requirements or work placement hours, industry strongly agrees on the need for rigorous training and assessment due to the high-risk nature of the activity. An effective strategy is grounded in extended periods of workplace practice and evaluation. Trainees should acquire practical skills and experience under the guidance of a suitably qualified workplace supervisor, adhering to predefined evaluation criteria.

Further details are available at:

- https://www.asqa.gov.au/rto/focus-compliance/series-1-trainers-and-assessors/chapter-4
- https://www.asqa.gov.au/resources/guides/guide-using-other-parties-collect-assessment-evidence

Section 8: Forming Strategic Partnerships for Tree Allocation

Industry recommends establishing strategic partnerships to identify trees that can be responsibly utilised for training purposes in manual tree felling courses.

Types of Partnerships:

- Commercial forest partnerships: Partnering with commercial forest entities to facilitate training on trees designated for thinning
- Government body partnerships: Collaborate with relevant local governmental bodies to enable the strategic allocation of public forest resources for training
- RTO-to-RTO partnerships: In geographically feasible situations, form alliances with trusted RTOs that have access to trees for training. This can facilitate the sharing of trainees and, possibly, theoretical and practical training resources.

Benefits:

- Sustainable resource utilisation: By engaging in partnerships, training providers can ensure a sustainable and streamlined approach to resource allocation, optimising the use of available trees for training
- Distributed responsibility: Such collaborations distribute the burden of training resource (trees) management, thereby reducing the operational and logistical load on individual training providers.

Section 9: Age Guidelines for Training in Manual Tree Felling

Operating a chainsaw to fell trees is categorised as a high-risk activity, requiring stringent safety measures and adequate training to mitigate the inherent risks involved.

In Australia, high risk work licences – which serve as regulatory prerequisites for engaging in various high-risk occupations – are restricted to individuals aged 18 years and above.

While a high risk work licence is not explicitly mandated for the operation of chainsaws in tree felling activities, industry strongly advocates for responsible training practices recommending that training in these specific units of competency is not suitable for individuals under the age of 16.

Consequently, it is strongly advised that training in the use of chainsaws for tree felling should not be conducted for individuals under the age of 16, aligning with industry's commitment to uphold the highest standards of safety and competence and to ensuring both the safety of operators and the broader community.

Section 10: Useful Information

Training resources:

- [Tree Faller's Manual](#) – A handbook for operators who need to fell trees manually using a chainsaw.
- [Tree falling safe behavioural observation](#) – A form to record behavioural observations for tree fellers.
- [Tree falling plan](#) – A checklist to help tree fallers plan to stay safe.
- [Professional tree felling competency assessment tool](#) – A training and assessment tool for tree fellers.
- [Tree faller logbook](#) – A logbook to track the time spent manually felling trees
- [Tree felling best practice guide](#) – Best practice guidelines for tree-felling
- [Other resources](#)

Additional skills that may be necessary for specific tasks or workplaces:

- FWPCOT3317 Use chainsaw within a tree
- FWPHAR3235 Conduct mechanically assisted tree falling operations