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How UAG measures safety performance by Doug Cunningham, Scottish and Southern Energy

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U.A.G. How UAG measures safety performance

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In the arb business we all like to tell anyone who will listen that we work in one of the most hazardous industries. The more important issue is how well do we control these hazards and avoid hurting people. On the basis of the old adage ‘if you can’t measure it, you can’t manage it’, it is important that we have a reliable way of measuring safety performance. The benefits of this are:

- the ability to benchmark your company or team’s performance against others in the same sector
- the ability to benchmark against other industries
- the ability to look at trends to see if performance is improving or if further action needs to be taken to get back on track

The large number of ways available to measure safety performance demonstrates that none are perfect and that it is difficult to have a common approach that satisfies everyone’s needs. For example, the standards of incident reporting differ greatly between companies, as do methods of categorising incidents. However, at an early stage the AA’s Utility Arboriculture Group (UAG) identified that in order to improve the safety performance of our sector, and be able to prove it, a common approach was necessary. As a result the UAG has been recording TRIR data for over four years.

The TRIR (or Total Recordable Injury Rate) is simply a measurement of the

frequency of significant injuries for every 100,000 hours worked and the UAG calculates it as follows:

$$\text{TRIR} = \frac{\text{number of recordable injuries} \times 100,000 \text{ man-hours}}{\text{man-hours worked}}$$

(Note: It is important to note that the definition of TRIR can vary across sectors and globally; some choose to use either 200,000 hours (an average working year) or 1,000,000 hours.)

Recordable injuries are defined as and limited to one of the following: fatality; major injury (HSE reportable); greater than three days lost time injury; greater than one day lost time injury; medically treatable injury (which is defined as management and care of a patient to combat disease or medical disorder, but does not result in a lost time injury).

Man-hours worked are defined as the total number of hours worked on utility arboriculture contracts by operatives (direct labour and contractors),

Arboricultural Association

Ullenwood Court, Ullenwood, Cheltenham, Glos, GL53 9QS, United Kingdom
 Tel +44 (0) 1242 522152 Fax +44 (0) 1242 577766 Email admin@trees.org.uk
 A Company Limited by Guarantee No 4070377, Registered as a Charity No. 1083845

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surveyors, supervisors, managers, admin and electrical staff.

The information is supplied monthly and anonymously to the Arb Association. Due to the variability of the TRIR value on a monthly basis it is more valid to look at the trend which is calculated by taking a 12-month rolling average.

The graph below shows the UAG figures for the last two years and includes a trend line.

This data represents information from eight companies, a mixture of electricity network operators and contractors. An effort is made to ensure that there is no double reporting. Currently an average of around 320,000 man-hours is reported every month. There was a significant increase in the amount of man-hours reported from January 2010.

Although it would be foolish to make assumptions based on these results about safety performance across the whole of the utility arb sector, they do give an insight into safety in powerline

clearance, which is well represented. What we can say here is that if the TRIR is an indication of safety performance then there has been no obvious improvement over the last two years. We can perhaps be optimistic in that an improvement in safety performance does not happen overnight and initiatives that continue to be implemented, partly through UAG discussions, are beginning to pay dividends as there has been a slight downwards trend in the past eight months. Perhaps it is too early to tell, but at least there is now a sound foundation to allow us to have a realistic view as time moves on. One thing is clear: there is plenty of room for improvement.

It is always interesting to see how we measure up against other reasonably similar sectors. This can be difficult if others are not collecting data in the same manner and right now we do not have official figures for general arb work or forestry in the UK. However, for interest, data from other sectors is available, mostly extracted from internet sources. This shows TRIR rates from 0.14 to 0.44

in the UK and averaging around 0.48 for oil exploration. In the US some higher rates are found with utilities at 1.50 and 'forestry, agriculture, fishing and hunting' at 1.54.

To add value to our data it is essential that we increase levels of reporting to give us a more accurate statistical representation of our performance. That means we need many more contributors from within the utility arb sector, not just from line clearance activities. In time, given greater contributions, we may be able to benchmark the performance of arb work in different sectors such as road, rail, electricity, water and telecoms within the UAG. If you are a contributor then you have the ability to measure yourself against the sector average.

The UAG's intention is to publish this information on its website on a monthly basis.

If you can help and are interested in contributing or have any other information on the TRIR in other sectors then this would be very useful. Please contact Mel Sutherland (mel@trees.org.uk).

