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# Arbor Age

THE AUSTRALIAN

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CONSULTING ARBORIST DECAYING WOOD RECYCLING WITHIN ARBOREAL ECOSYSTEMS



# Arbor Age

THE AUSTRALIAN

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ISSN 1327 1784

The Australian Arbor Age  
is Published Bi-Monthly by  
Mayne Publications Pty Ltd



ACN 130 678 812

ABN 27 130 678 812

Postal:

PO Box 489

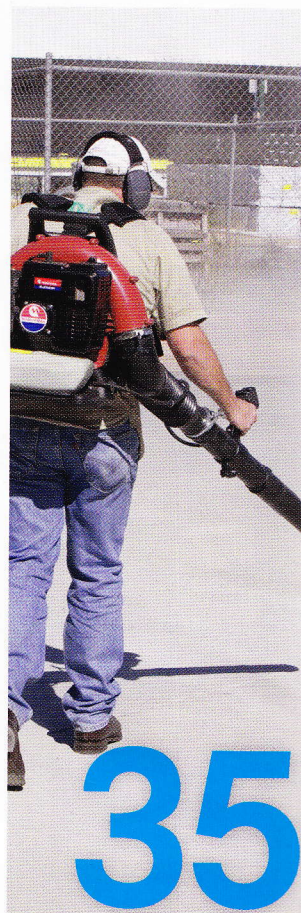
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# FEATURES.

- 8. Getting Qualified  
By Peter Chaffin
- 14. Industry Legend - Mark Hartley  
By Stefana Vella
- 22. Get To Know Your Rep  
Richard Coulter from ASPAC Group
- 24. Energy Saving Benefits of Shade Trees in  
Relation to Water Use  
By Stephen Livesley
- 30. Preventing the Spread of Myrtle Rust

# CONSULTING ARBORIST.

- 38. Decaying Wood Recycling within  
Arboreal Ecosystems  
By Andrew Cowan
- 46. Reaching Beyond Our Limits  
By Guy Meilleur
- 62. Tree Rescue or Not Tree Rescue?  
By Graeme McMahon

# ON THE COVER



Bynorm chainsaw accessory range and Gravelly Treker utility vehicle.

# REGULARS.

- 4. From the Publisher
- 34. Test Drives
- 54. Association News
- 66. Business and Finance
- 72. Eye on the Industry and  
Innovative Products
- 77. Absolute Shockers
- 78. Subscribe Now
- 80. Arbor Trader



# TREE RESCUE OR NOT TREE RESCUE?



To create a framework for the following discussion I need to clarify the terms for assisting a tree climber. 'Climber recovery' is the term used when a work mate gives assistance to a climber in the tree or their return to the ground. 'Tree rescue' is when an outside organisation is called upon to perform those duties. This could be any one of the combating authorities, for example; fire rescue, state emergency service, police search and rescue, or another tree climbing crew.

The current OH&S systems and tender processes are pushing for all climbing crews to have a trained and prepared tree rescue person on site at all times a climber is aloft. I question the preparedness of persons deemed as qualified as a result of the current training packages. The concept and requirement of 'rescue' as projected by the current accreditation system has the moral high-ground in our modern workplace. We as practitioners have become very accountable to rules born from good intentions. It is difficult to discuss this matter openly without appearing that you are attempting to lower workplace safety. This conundrum is a boon for trainers, assessors and auditors. Unfortunately the outcomes of 'tree rescue training' fall well short in practice.

When considering the diverse tasks of working aloft, I see an opportunity to create a climber recovery qualification, if we must have one. It should be appropriate to your normal means of access, numbers of staff and stature of trees. The second level of qualification should be 'tree rescue'. The level of competence must ensure a rescuer can perform the above with a degree of competence in a variety of situations. That competency can then be embraced by other rescue organisations.

The controversy I propose is - it is reasonable to perform tree climbing activities without a tree recovery/rescue person on site. Some company policies demand that a tree rescue capability must be in attendance. That is their prerogative



however such demands need to be assessed in the face of commonsense for the remainder of industry. The training outcomes for tree rescue are well short of the skills required for such a task. In addition the insistence that any climber aloft must have a prepared rescue climber on the ground is flawed.

### EXAMPLE

If a climber requires assistance to descend to the ground, according to the current requirement a qualified rescue climber will be prepared and waiting to give that assistance. A basic rule for professional rescue organisations is 'do not put yourself at risk' and look for dangers before entering the scene. As the recovery climber leaves the ground to commence access, there are now two climbers aloft. I would like to 'freeze-frame' this situation. The current rules don't give any guidance as to whether we now need one or two extra rescue climbers standing by as there are now two climbers aloft. One thing is certain; if we are not to commence climbing without a rescue person on the ground, we surely cannot have two climbers aloft without an additional rescue climber. One of

the climbers aloft already needs assistance and is often the more competent climber for the crew. The current procedures are being vehemently upheld by some and now written into many contracts. When I have put this conundrum to some of its proponents, not one has been able to give a solution.

A two-person crew is a normal and reasonable way to conduct climbing operations. It is usual to have one climber and one ground person. The requirements for recovery climbers must be workable for a two-person crew.

The current cry for onsite rescue climbers appears to be projected by some training providers enjoying additional demand and academics producing a flawed protective web for OH&S manuals. Industry needs regulations and guidance material that is transferable to our work places. It is long overdue that industry practitioners need to give industry feedback in relation to training outcomes.

On my worksites, climbers being mentored enjoy the luxury of having a prepared recovery



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climber on site. However many times when I am climbing I don't have a recovery climber on the ground. This is based on the concept that an inexperienced climber is more likely to need assistance and the probability of an experienced climber needing assistance is reduced.

I have stated for some time the most hazardous part of my work is driving on the Victorian roads to and from my sites. Having an ambulance follow me on the roads would be a more appropriate safety precaution than a recovery climber on the ground as I would be addressing an item with a higher probability. In addition I am certain the ambulance officers can perform their expected duties well. The same cannot be said for the 'Kellogg's ticketed rescue climber'.

My company does not recognise any of the current qualifications as industry competence. We view them as 'learners permits' or 'entry level', similar to the standing of a learners permit for a vehicle. My understanding of the unit 'Undertake Tree Rescue' is of an entry level competency. That unit of competency must be of an operational standard.

Any person qualified in tree rescue must be able to deal with most of the variables that could be encountered and perform a rescue.

Further, I would be interested to know how academics propose to integrate unskilled entry-level workers into a two-person crew. The qualifications now being demanded in some workplaces are very costly in time and money. Unfortunately they fall short of ensuring candidates are competent, to respond to a reasonable range of tasks as a rescue climber.

I propose a system of learner's permits and mentoring, under the supervision of competent practitioners to be an acceptable option for acquiring the practical skills required. This should be introduced to enable unskilled persons to enter our industry without having to subject prospective employers to lost time and costs. One problem is how do we determine such supervisors to be competent? In addition - how does industry determine the competence of the assessors making those determinations?

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The current system appears to bind an employer into weeks of training before the new worker becomes employable on the job. Becoming a productive employee is not achieved by some. After minimal training time I strongly question how competent the new climber will be if required to conduct a tree recovery.

As most are aware I climb and remove some difficult trees. I question the skills of the many experienced climbers to access my normal work positions, let alone rescue me. How can I and other large-tree technicians seriously regard the current 'tree rescue' qualification as reasonable? **AA**

\* The material above is drawn from the Tree Rescue booklet written by Graeme McMahon.



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