





## IN THE FIELD WITH MATT LOGAN

### *Emergency Preparedness: Promoting a Culture of Safety*

Emergency Preparedness (EP) and Aerial Rescue (AR) could be considered the practical insurance component of production tree work – you do all the paperwork hoping you’ll never need it, and if you do, you hope that what you have in place is comprehensive, efficient and sufficient. If you, like myself, consider an accident an unplanned event than it makes sense that increased planning will decrease the opportunity for accidents to occur. To me that is the whole justification for EP and AR.

Editor’s Note: This is a great follow-up to last issue’s article on joining a safety group. Give the specifics.

**T**he reality of our industry is that it is dangerous and there is great opportunity for mishap. As arborists we can only attempt to work safely in what is often an unsafe environment or situation. Although most agree safety is important in the industry, sometimes our words don’t synchronize with our actions. Production and the “getter done!” mentality can often overshadow and compromise safety. All parties involved from management to the

production crew must be aware when this begins to happen, and stop and reprioritize.

Unfortunately, due to privacy issues, most reported industry accidents are kept confidential and inaccessible to the industry, while even more go unreported and are swept under the rug. These are lost opportunities to learn and analyze for the betterment of the industry. We must use every tool at our disposal to create and enhance the safety of our workplace. It is my belief that through the incorporation

and implementation of EP protocol and AR training specific to company and job relevance, industry accidents can lessen in number and severity. This will propel our industry’s professionalism and legitimacy.

**Adjacent.** Author Matt Logan – utilizing an adjustable friction saver on a spar pole can make rescue easier. **Above.** The project risk should be clear, relevant and understood by all members of the crew. Note all photos in the article supplied by the author.



In this article I will avoid focusing on specific EP and AR scenarios but instead on the proactive ways we can better prepare and cope with unexpected events during work by creating a suitable and functional EP and AR framework. As this is a complex and vast subject, this article in no way can cover all aspects, but I hope to at least initiate further dialogue on the subject.

### Emergency Preparedness

Most companies integrate an EP plan in one form or another at the workplace, although sometimes they may be unaware of it. It is my belief that EP starts by creating a culture of safety and accountability – ensuring licenses, certificates and training is all up to date, as well as proper forms and paperwork is done properly and diligently. Success is achieved when all people involved understand that shortcuts and ill planning are unacceptable and safety is non-negotiable.

**On-Site EP.** The most common EP is likely the tailboard talk or project risk assessment. This can be a verbal discussion, but is better to be documented while viewing the project at hand. Remember that in the eyes of the law, if it isn't written down, it didn't happen! These on-site meetings and forms can vary in complexity and thoroughness depending on the company and the task. For example, you may not need a 30-minute meeting regarding a crabapple prune, although extra time and documentation may be advised for a large high-risk removal.

Some information recommended for a project risk assessment form or tailboard talk includes but is not inclusive to:

- Date
- Location: include the full address and 911 number and if deemed necessary, the closest major intersection
- Crew: full names and designations of positions
- Task: brief description of the task(s) to be preformed
- Risks: tree structure, hydro, bees, etc...
- Targets: buildings, cars, pedestrians, etc...
- Risk Abatement: what can be done to limit risks, i.e. flagged-off area, disconnect power, etc...





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- Emergency Info: 911 address, closest hospital, rescue plan, rescuer designated, location of phone and first aid kit, etc...

I must admit that in the beginning, I was hesitant to mandate that a risk assessment form be completed for every project. I was concerned it could take too much time. I now find it extremely useful as it focuses the crew on the task at hand, clarifies their specific roles, highlights risks and special concerns and maps out the plan of attack. We have adapted our forms to the needs of our company and continue to refine them to enhance function and clarity. We make sure that all members of the crew have input and contribute information and ideas to create a more comprehensive plan. We also have all crew members sign off on the plan; this gives them ownership and

responsibility and ensures everyone is on the same page (literally).

**Safety/Post Accident Meetings.** Depending on the size of a company, safety meetings may be mandatory, but I recommend all companies have regular safety meetings as well as special meetings after an accident/issue arises. These meetings can dissect the issues while still fresh in everyone's mind and find out what chain of events lead to the undesired result. Open discussion regarding breakdowns and required changes in technique, protocol, equipment and even communication can help lessen the opportunity for a similar event to happen again. If we do not learn from our mistakes we are doomed to repeat them! On the flip side, I also find meetings useful regarding success and a job well done, and will often have a meeting tracing our steps and reviewing a project that went exceptionally well.

**Communication.** I often find when dissecting an incident that a communication breakdown is the root cause. How many of us have started a sentence or heard a co-worker say, "Well, I thought she/he was going to do this..." An assumption should not replace communication. Many times communication at the jobsite can collapse due to a variety of reasons including personal issues, friction among the crew or a misunderstanding of responsibilities. Proper communication can take the form of a well-presented safety meeting or utilizing a command response system of "STAND CLEAR!" and "ALL CLEAR!" while working aloft.

The fact is there may be times when your co-workers have each other's life in

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**Adjacent Page. Top.** When using contractors, ensure that they are involved in the planning and the risk assessment. **Bottom Left.** Practicing several AR scenarios throughout the season keeps the training fresh. **Bottom Right.** When performing AR training, utilize the most commonly used systems and equipment. **Above.** Discuss climbing system characteristics and limitations during safety meetings.