Tailboard Talk Framework

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Originally published in* Ontario Arborist*, Dec./Jan. 2019 edition.

The article below represents the opinion of the author and is not legal advice. The author is neither a lawyer nor an MOL inspector.

The ISAO Safety Committee recently sat down to put together a generic tailboard document that could be used by our members. Three of us—Mike, Matt, and yours truly—collected dozens of tailboards from around the arboriculture community and tried to create a universal standardized document that would suit everyone's needs.

And... we failed. In fact, we never reached complete agreement on what the document should contain. That isn't surprising, since the three of us have different needs.

Mike, for example, does a lot of utility work, while I do next to none. It therefore makes sense that his tailboard would have more detail with regards to electrical work. Matt, on the other hand, often works in cottage country, where he might start his day on a boat. So his tailboard might need to include space for boat-related safety information.

In the end, we succeeded in creating a document—after we set our differences aside and developed a framework that each of us could modify to suit our needs. This article breaks down the factors we considered, and how we laid out this framework.

Please keep in mind that this framework represents the things that we thought should be considered. It is **not** a complete list.

Note: The descriptions below refer to the downloadable tailboard framework document, available here.

Section 1: Rescue plan

Arborist Safe Work Practices refer to an emergency response plan, and construction regulations say that before workers use a fall protection system, a written rescue procedure must be in place. It is my hope that Section 1 will satisfy these requirements.

The steps here are pretty self-explanatory. Just write down the following info:

1. **Name and address of the nearest hospital.** (Google is your friend.)
2. **First aid/rescue kit location.** For those of you working in proximity, it may be best not to keep it inside of a bucket that may become energized.
3. **Worksite address.** The more details you fill in, the easier it will be for EMS to find you. Our framework includes room for additional info on where you'll be working, such as "Campsite 524, west end of the park."
4. **Rescue plan.** This is a detailed break-down of what happens in the case of an emergency. The plan will vary according to the type of work being performed, the number of crew members on-site, available equipment, etc.

Sample rescue plan (four-person crew)

Arborist 1 has an incident while climbing. Arb. 2 calls 911 and requests High Angle Rescue Unit, then heads to main gate to escort EMS to work zone. Arb. 3 performs outer and inner perimeter survey and initiates rescue if it is safe to do so. Arb. 4 provides ground support for Arb 3.

Section 2: Checklist

The checklist serves two purposes:

1. It reminds the supervisor and workers of the things they need to consider before starting work.
2. It reminds the employer to provide the time required to properly take these things into account.

To elaborate on the second point, let's take climbing gear as an example. How often are workers inspecting their climbing gear? Both the **ASWP Manual** and the owner's manuals for our harnesses and climbing lines say they should always be inspected prior to use. So the check box on the tailboard framework reminds my crew to

check—and reminds me that I need to give them enough time to flake their ropes and inspect their gear.

Section 3: Tree-specific inspection

A. Crew sign-off

As you can see, the crew sign-off includes codes for the work to fill in the chart. All workers involved in the work also need to sign off after they have gone through the process of designating rolls, identifying targets and hazards, initiating mitigations/controls, and assessing whether the mitigations/controls have effectively mitigated the risk posed to the workers.

B. Risk assessment

Once the job hazards and mitigations/controls have been put in place, an assessment must be completed to determine whether it is safe to proceed with the work. Under "Risk" in the hazard chart, write Yes or No.

C. Hazard chart

This section of our Tailboard used to be checkboxes as well. But we found two issues:

1. 1. Checkboxes made it too easy to cheat. One is tempted to tick every box just to be covered.
2. 2. On a site with multiple trees to be worked on, a checkbox-based tailboard didn't lead to a clear resolution. It wasn't clear whether each tree had been assessed for targets and hazards, and whether mitigations and controls had been designed for identified hazards.

Therefore, we decided to move to codes that would track individual trees and their respective targets, hazards and mitigations/controls to protect workers.

That's not to say you always need a separate line for each tree. Sometimes my crews head into a forest tract and remove trees along a trail, and each worker may end up doing several trees. In a scenario where one person will be felling 10 ash trees of the same age, with the same targets, hazards and mitigations, it's ok to have one line that addresses all trees.

Tree no. and species	Arborist and support	Work type	Hazards	Targets	Hazard zone identified and controlled	Mitigations and controls	Risk	Modification
1–10 ash	Captain Amazing on saw Jane Doe on pull line	F	DW	T	Yes	Directional line	Yes	None

However, if one of those trees just ain't like the others—say it has a giant hanger in it—I would expect the chart to read "trees 1–9" and "tree 10" on separate lines, because tree 10 needs its own line that addresses the hazard.

Section 4. Notes

As mentioned, this document can't and won't account for every scenario. There may be unique situations for which the chart doesn't work particularly well. But you still have to define rolls and responsibilities, identify hazards to the worker, design mitigations to protect the workers, and then assess to see whether it is safe to proceed.

This blank page allows for all of these things to take place in a different format. This blank page also allows for things like sketching complicated rigging scenarios, or creating checklists for ground support. Don't forget, all you really need to perform a tailboard is a pen and paper.

Arborist Safe Work Practises document, 4th edition (revised Feb, 2016) can be found **HERE**.

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