

INFORMATION NOTE: Safety, Felling Permission & Winblown Trees



Following last weekends storms landowners and foresters are now facing the challenging task of picking up the pieces after the devastation caused by Storm Darragh. We have seen huge numbers of trees toppled by windblow, and whilst the scale of this damage is still being assessed there are large areas through Wales that have been affected.

For anyone facing the clearance of windblown trees, there should be two primary considerations to address prior to any action; **Safety**, and **Felling Permission**.

SAFETY

Landowners are responsible for taking reasonable steps to ensure the safety of those working in, walking across or otherwise visiting their land.

Landowners and farmers should engage experienced professionals with the relevant training to assess and clear windthrow whatever the severity or size of the area involved.

The [Forest Industry Safety Accord \(FISA\): Managing Health and Safety in Forestry](#) guidance explains the responsibilities of landowners and others involved in forestry operations.

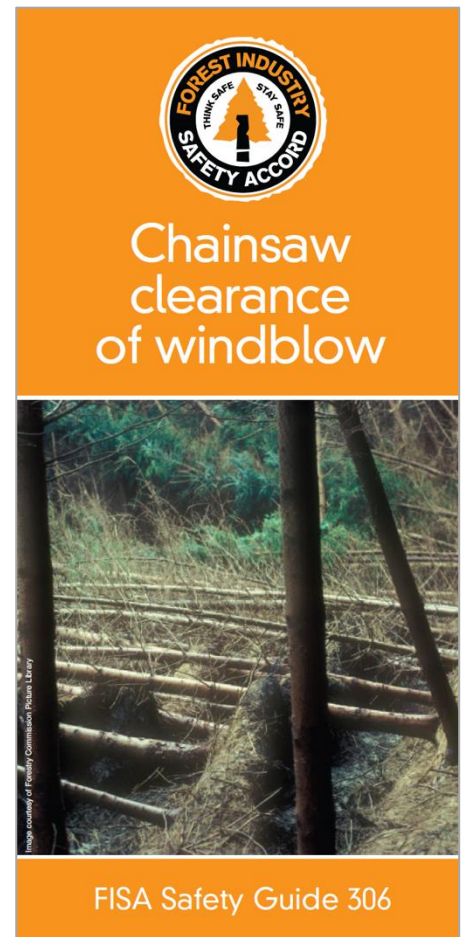
Windthrown trees under tension and compression behave very differently to standing trees when cut and the resultant forces can be violent and rapid when released. Working with chainsaws amongst windblown trees requires a very high level of technical competency which is held by professionals with appropriate training, experience and the correct clothing and equipment. [The Health and Safety Executive](#) website provides forestry specific information on health and safety.

Chainsaw operations should be kept to a minimum. Mechanised harvesting is much safer though still requires competent machine operators and it may not be economically viable in the smallest woodlands.

Assess the affected areas from a safe vantage point or consider using a drone to provide a greater level of accuracy on the scale and location of the impact.

Deal first with those trees that present the greatest hazard. A priority will be creating safe access for those clearing trees and repairing and/or securing fences for stock.

Reopening public access for amenity and recreation may be a pressure point, but this cannot be at the expense of safety.



FELLING PERMISSIONS

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) regulates tree felling through the Forestry Act 1967. A felling licence granted by Natural Resources Wales shall be required for the felling of growing trees unless they are covered by an exemption under the Act. **Where windblow is being felled, a licence will still be needed for any trees that are still living.**

Entirely uprooted trees and snapped trees would not be considered as living – i.e where they have experienced something so destructive that their immediate survival is simply not possible.

- If you are claiming exemption from felling permission (trees posing an immediate danger), it's your responsibility to record any evidence of how it applies to the felling you are intending to carry out. NRW strongly advise that you take multiple photographs of any situation where you are claiming exemption and record decisions made in your risk assessment and method statement for the task, and retain these records for at least 3 years.
- Tree felling required to prevent a danger or abate a nuisance is covered by an exception however; there must be a real and immediate danger, rather than a perceived risk which may become a danger in the future. An example of this would be to prevent immediate danger to a footpath, road or property.
- Another exception exists for trees felled by or at the request of statutory undertakers (such as power and water companies) where the trees have blown onto power lines and or blown across roads and tracks that are required to safely access the line.

It is an offence to cut down some trees without a licence. It is also an offence to sell timber that has been illegal cut down. If convicted of illegal tree felling, NRW can issue an unlimited fine.

Information regarding felling licences and how to apply can be found on the [NRW Website](#).