SAFETY CRITICAL INFORMATION

Northern Ireland Electricity Networks

SCI Number: **26/05** ***Date of Issue:*** **7th July 2026**

Subject: **Utility Arborist Fall from Height While Working in a Tree**

Target Audience: **All Authorised Persons**

Detail:

An experienced Utility Arborist working for one of our contracting partners was carrying out tree pruning operations at height above ground level when they fell from the tree.

As a result of the fall, the arborist sustained serious fractures. Emergency services attended, and the injured person received immediate medical treatment before being taken to hospital for further care. Our thoughts are with the injured arborist, and we wish them a full and speedy recovery.

An investigation is underway to understand the circumstances surrounding the incident, identify any contributing factors, and capture lessons that can help prevent similar incidents in the future. Without prejudicing the ongoing investigation, ensure that the following actions are undertaken.



Approximate position of Arborist before fall

Actions required

Pre-Climbing steps

- **Only climb where the work cannot be safely completed from the ground and the use of a MEWP is not reasonably practicable**
- Complete a Whole Job Risk Assessment (WJRA) before climbing.
- Inspect all PPE, harnesses, ropes, and climbing equipment before use.
- Inspect the tree's crown, stem, and root area for hazards to climbers, ground workers, members of the public, property, and overhead lines.
- Select sound handholds, footholds, and anchor points; avoid deadwood and structural defects. Test each new anchor before transferring onto it. Always follow the principle of "**attach before detach**" when changing anchor points.

Two Rope Working

- **A two-rope system must be considered as the first option for any climbing operation**.
- **Primary** and **Backup** ropes must be connected to your harness attachment points using independent connections.

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- The Primary and Backup ropes should be attached to independent anchor points where possible; if none is available, a shared anchor should be used for both systems.
- Ensure any slack in the rope systems is kept to a minimum, limiting any potential fall to a maximum of 500mm.
- At all times, ensure the Primary rope allows direct descent to the ground without re-anchoring. Ideally, the Backup rope should also reach the ground, and both ropes must be fitted with a stopper device or knots.

Work Positioning

- Once the work position has been established, in addition to the Primary and Backup climbing systems, a Supplementary Anchor Point for preventing or arresting a fall or swing shall be used.
- The climber's Lanyard or Wire Core flip-line shall be secured around a suitable Supplementary Anchor Point and must remain in place until the work at that position is completed.

Performing the cut

- Before making any cut, confirm that your climbing systems are independently anchored where practicable, and will remain intact once the cut has been made.
- Ensure you don't become distracted or complacent, trace each climbing line from your harness to its anchor point and carefully assess the section of timber you are about to remove. Make sure all anchor points will remain secure after the cut is completed.
- Position all ropes and flip-line well clear of the saw's cutting path and away from the expected fall zone of the timber. If there is any doubt that an anchor point will remain effective during the cutting operation, stop work immediately and reposition it to an alternative position.
- The cut must not be made until secure and effective anchor point(s) have been established.

For further information and detailed requirements, refer to
HSG-035 Safe Climbing Procedures and Equipment for Tree Work