Tree Safety Management System

Issue 15, February 2014

Newsletter

and events calendar

QTRA Version 5

Have you used Quantified Tree Risk Assessment Version 5 yet? We have had some great feedback from existing users who are finding it easier to use and communicate to their clients and managers. The four 'traffic-light' colour codes of red, amber, yellow and green help arborists to inform their client's decisions in simple terms rather than wading through numbers that can sometimes be difficult to comprehend.

Following an initial release of Version 5 in October 2013, we took on board comments from users and have substantially modified the User Manual and QTRA Practice Note to clarify the ways in which the method can be applied and how it can inform risk decision-making in accordance with current best practice. There is expanded guidance on accounting for the costs of risk control, where both the financial cost and the loss of tree-related benefits can be balanced with the expected reduction in risk.

Getting the Message Out

Since the release of QTRA Version 5 in October, we have hosted training for new users of the method in Australia, the UK and New Zealand. At the same time, we have run update workshops for existing users to familiarise them with the new approach. Over the next three months, we have training workshops scheduled for the UK, France, Sweden and Australia, including Tasmania. If you are not familiar with the new method, download the QTRA Practice Note, which is available on our website www.qtra.co.uk/cms/index.php?section=25 in English, French and Swedish.

Along with the QTRA training and update workshops, we run our Practitioner's Guide to Visual Tree Assessment, a one-day workshop that looks at the tree as a self-optimising structure and the factors to be considered when assessing the structural state of a tree. Designed to run in tandem with QTRA training, this is a great aid to estimating the probability (chance or likelihood) of tree failure.

Calculator Application Free to QTRA Users

As well as the familiar QTRA manual calculator, we have updated our calculator application for Windows® Desktop and with the help of our colleagues at Ezytreev, we have released a beta version of the calculator application for Android® devices. It shouldn't be too long before it is available on iOS® for iPad® and iPhone®. Registered users of QTRA can install two copies free of charge for use on one desktop and one mobile device.

Fig 1. Android Calculator

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Events Calendar

UNITED KINGDOM

Wakefield

26 Feb 2014 - QTRA Update

Cardiff

04 March 2014 - QTRA Training
05 March 2014 - VTA Training

Chorley

08 April 2014 - QTRA Training
09 April 2014 - VTA Training
10 April 2014 - QTRA Update

Glasgow

29 April 2014 - QTRA Training
30 April 2014 - VTA Training

Guildford

29 April 2014 - QTRA Training
30 April 2014 - VTA Training
1 May 2014 - QTRA Update

Cheltenham

06 May 2014 - QTRA Training
07 May 2014 - VTA Training
08 May 2014 - QTRA Update

Belfast

12 May 2014 - QTRA Training
13 May 2014 - VTA Training

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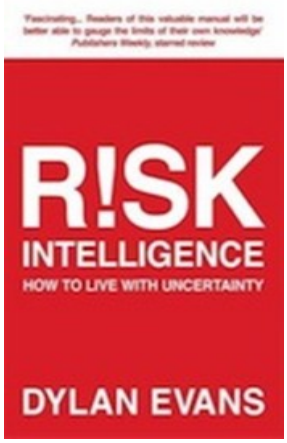
Risk Intelligence and QTRA

A key element of a tree risk assessment is assigning probabilities to uncertain events in the future.

The ability to estimate reasonable probabilities is partially down to the method used. For example, with QTRA we fully appreciate that with Targets (land-use), using maths to work out the likelihood of a vehicle occupying a road at the time a tree fails across it, is clearly far superior to any attempt to use words with highly ambiguous meanings such as very likely, likely, somewhat likely, and unlikely.

Selecting a Probability of Failure range is the part of a tree risk assessment where we have the greatest level of uncertainty, and are most susceptible to being over or under confident. In the last newsletter we explored the advantages and benefits of our training and calibration exercises when considering Probability of Failure .



Apart from attending training, there is an additional exercise we can do that may help us determine whether we are are susceptible to be under confident, or over confident, when estimating probabilities. It is to measure what Dylan Evans calls 'Risk Intelligence' in his book 'Risk Intelligence: How to Live with Uncertainty'.

Risk Intelligence is a relatively recent term and is the ability to estimate probabilities accurately. For example, professional gamblers often have good risk intelligence. Having good risk intelligence is about striking a balance between being cocksure and a fence sitter. Ideally, we want to plough a middle furrow, equally distant between being under confident and over confident when estimating probabilities.

You can get an estimate of your Risk Intelligence by taking a test on general knowledge to work out your Risk Quotient (RQ). Dylan Evans has a free Basic RQ Test on his Projection Point website www.projectionpoint.com. It only takes about 5 minutes and will give you a RQ as well as a graphical representation of your calibration curve relative to a perfect one. This enables you to see at which points along the calibration curve you were most over or under confident.

Storm damaged trees

With fallen and damaged trees across the UK following recent storms, it won't be long before the lawyers will be asking 'was that foreseeable?' while trotting out a troupe of experts specialising in the art of hindsight.

When a cavity, crack or decay is visible after a tree has fallen, it might be possible to demonstrate that with enough effort a tree inspection could have identified the flaw at which the tree failed; but whether it presented a high risk is another matter entirely.

Quantified Tree Risk Assessment allows you to consider tree failures in the context of land-use. Given the level of risk presented by the tree prior to its failure, would it have been reasonable and proportionate to control the risk? While the retrospective application of QTRA can be helpful in these situations, there is no substitute for a history of reasonable risk management, perhaps informed by a QTRA based policy.


Source: Dave Geall

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Events Calendar

AUSTRALIA

Hobart

04 March 2014 - QTRA Training
05 March 2014 - VTA Training

Adelaide

11 March 2014 - QTRA Training
12 March 2014 - VTA Training
13 March 2014 - QTRA Update

Melbourne

17 March 2014 - QTRA Training
18 March 2014 - VTA Training

SWEDEN

Stockholm

27 March 2014 - QTRA Training
28 March 2014 - VTA Training

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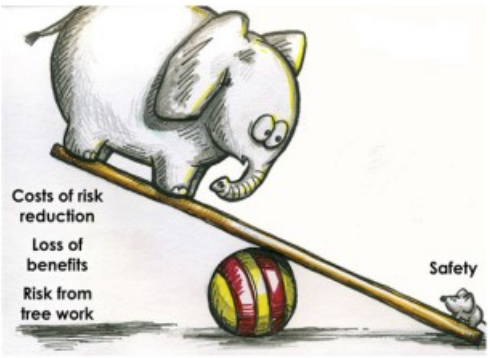
Is it Safe?

There can be a natural tendency for clients to think that managing tree risk is about making trees 'safe', or minimising the risk. For many, safety is the complete absence of risk. With a little thought it soon becomes apparent that to make something completely safe and remove risk entirely is neither achievable nor desirable.

Minimising risk is an endless and futile tail-chasing exercise where there is always a lower level of risk to aim for, with no regard to how much it might cost.

To manage tree risk to a safe, or lower level, without giving consideration to the loss of benefits from trees, or costs of the tree works, and the additional risks attached to doing the tree work, is to have an unbalanced and biased approach. It is to be risk averse and worshiping at the unattainable altar of 'safety no matter the cost to the client'.

When someone asks whether a tree is safe, what they are actually asking is, "Is it safe enough?" Safe enough means accounting for costs and loss of benefits in accordance with the legal Rosetta Stone of liability, 'reasonable practicability'. Safe enough is about being risk aware by not only seeing but also weighing the elephant in the room.



But what does safe enough mean as a level of risk? What is considered safe enough for one person could be perilous to someone else, and tolerable to another. What we do know though is what safe enough means in numbers. According to many international publications on risk, an annual risk is safe enough to require no further consideration when it is as low as 1/1 000 000. When imposed on others a risk as high as 1/10 000 may be safe enough and will usually be tolerated if to reduce it further would involve disproportionate costs.

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