

# A matter of urgency

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## A new safety accord aims to raise the standard of health and safety in the forestry industry Alistair Sandels explains

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The forest industry is one of the most dangerous sectors in which to work in the UK. In the 5 years up to March 2012, there was an average of 10.4 fatalities per 100,000 workers, more than 3 times the rate for the construction industry. Early in 2012, largely driven by these statistics, the [Health and Safety Executive \(HSE\)](#) called a safety summit, bringing together all the main stakeholders throughout the wood chain, from woodland and forest landowning interests, agents and contractors to sawmillers and timber hauliers.

The message was clear: things need to change. Everyone involved in forestry and woodlands had to start to work together in a coordinated and managed way to reduce the number of serious and fatal accidents. Old prejudices needed to be parked and common goals agreed as a matter of urgency. A range of businesses and leading industry organisations consequently joined to form the [Forest Industry Safety Accord \(FISA\)](#) .

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The outcome saw the emergence of an industry-led FISA steering group, which set out the commitment that each organisation, and the sector at large, could make to raise the standard of health and safety in the workplace. The group, now led by recently appointed Chief Executive Gillian Clark, agreed 8 specific work areas for particular focus, with working groups to bring forward recommendations to improve safety performance.

"Among its top priorities, [FISA Working Group 8](#) has launched the forestry works manager and main contractor training course," Clark explains. The day-long course will provide attendees with a knowledge and understanding of site safety management. It will include how to evaluate a site, and how to fill out an appropriate risk assessment. Training course details and booking forms are available on the FISA website.

### Standards and guidance

Meanwhile, [FISA Working Group 6](#) is developing guidance and standards on issues that are unique or particular to the timber haulage sector. A driver safety booklet and driver training DVD have been produced, and will be accompanied by timber crane training.

FISA's key objective when deciding on any health and safety initiative is to not reinvent the wheel. Where adequate standards already exist, the safest and most cost-effective option is

often to use what is available. FISA is not planning to introduce mandatory training schemes for timber haulage, leaving it to the responsible duty holder to identify training requirements, and to determine whether any particular standards or schemes can fulfil those needs.

FISA continues to provide [chainsaw refresher training](#) . It is also engaged in defining good and emerging best practice.

"Having had personal experience of a number of serious forestry-related incidents, I have an acute understanding of the importance of health and safety in the forest. As an industry-led organisation, FISA has a deep understanding of the sector and therefore can ensure that guidance is structured effectively and practically for implementation. I encourage members involved in forestry and forestry-related activities to get involved and to support FISA in its excellent work."

**John Lockhart**FRICS, Chairman at Lockhart Garratt and Chairman of RICS Rural Professional Group

Landowner interests are represented on the steering group by [Confor](#) and for [RICS](#) by myself (representing forest and woodland managers on behalf of [Fountains Forestry](#) ) and Jim Colchester of [Buccleuch Estates](#) . RICS members practising in the UK often have the overarching responsibility for safe delivery of forest and woodland operations. FISA offers support in managing safety risk and raising the overall standards and competence of all those managing and employing in the wood chain.

Members and their employers can join FISA and not only align themselves with the accord, but take advantage of the growing body of best practice information, including a directory of members.

**Alastair Sandels FRICS is Investment Director at Fountains Forestry**

## **Further information**

- Visit [FISA](#) for details on how to join and the benefits of membership
- Related competencies include: [Forestry and woodland management](#)