Arborist Tree Climbing

Business Name:	ABN:	
Business Address:		
Contact Person:	Phone:	Email:

THIS RISK ASSESSMENT IS APPROVED BY THE PCBU OF THE PROJECT

Under the Work Health and Safety Regulation (WHS Regulation), a person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) is required to ensure that a RISK ASSESSMENT is prepared before the proposed work starts.

Full Name:		
Signature:	Title:	Date:

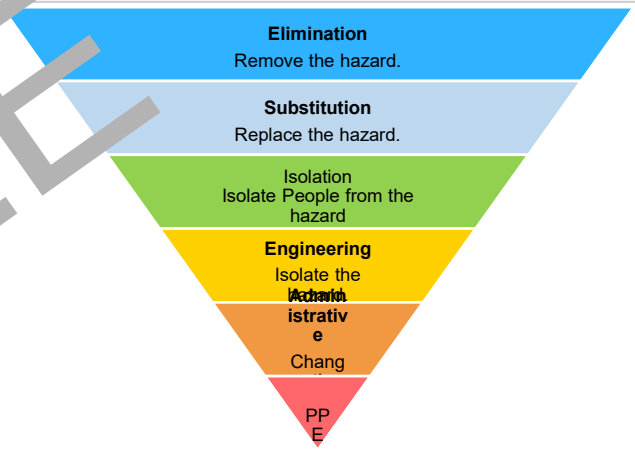
CLIENT OR PRINCIPAL CONTRACTOR DETAILS

Client:	SCOPE OF WORKS
Project Name:	
Project Address:	
Project Manager:	
Contact Phone:	
Date Risk Assessment supplied to Project Manager:	

RISK MATRIX

LIKELIHOOD	INSIGNIFICANT	MINOR	MODERATE	MAJOR	CATASTROPHIC	SCORE	ACTION
ALMOST CERTAIN	3 HIGH	3 HIGH	4 ACUTE	4 ACUTE	4 ACUTE		
LIKELY	2 MODERATE	3 HIGH	3 HIGH	4 ACUTE	4 ACUTE	4A ACUTE	DO NOT PROCEED
POSSIBLE	1 LOW	2 MODERATE	3 HIGH	4 ACUTE	4 ACUTE	3H HIGH	Rev before work
UNLIKELY	1 LOW	1 LOW	2 MODERATE	3 HIGH	4 ACU	2M MO RATE	Ensure control measures in place.
RARE	1 LOW	1 LOW	2 MODERATE	3 HIGH	3 H	1L LOW	Monitor and keep records.

HIERARCHY OF CONTROLS



Risk Rating & Required Action:

4A	Stop work. The risk is intolerable. E inate the hazar redesign the activity before proceeding. A Safe Work Method Statement (SWMS) or hi er-level authorisati is required.
3H	Review and approve additional c rols b ask arts. Senior supervisor sign-off needed.
2M	Ensure all nominated controls are in ace and effe ive. Proceed with caution; monitor conditions.
1L	Proceed, following standard operating procedures Monitor and keep records.

Consequence Scale:

Consequence	People (injury/illness)	Project / Assets	Compliance / Reputation
Catastrophic	Fatality or permanent total disability	project shutdown	Significant regulator intervention; criminal prosecution
Major	Serious injury/illness (hospital > 5 days)	critical delay	Improvement notice; major media coverage
Moderate	Medical-treatment injury; lost-time > 1 day	moderate delay	Minor breach; adverse client comment
Minor	First-aid only, no lost time	negligible delay	Isolated non-conformance
Insignificant	No injury	no schedule impact	Deviation caught and corrected on site

Notes on Hierarchy of Controls:
Remember to apply controls in the preferred order shown by the coloured pyramid:

1. **Eliminate**
2. Substitute
3. Isolate
4. Engineering
5. Administrative
6. PPE

Always document **why** a lower-order control is accepted if elimination or substitution is not reasonably practicable.

aligned with Safe Work Australia's Managing the risk of fatigue at work *(2023) and ISO 45001:2018 clauses 6–8.*

JOB STEP	POTENTIAL HAZARDS	IR	CONTROL MEASURES	RR
SPECIFIC WORK STEPS	HAZARDS THAT MAY ARISE	INITIAL RISK	SPECIFIC MEASURES TO BE PUT IN PLACE TO ELIMINATE OR CONTROL THE RISKS	RESIDUAL RISK
1. Governance, WHS Duties and Consultation	• Lack of clearly defined WHS responsibilities for officers, PCBUs, managers and workers in relation to arborist tree climbing • Insufficient consultation with workers, elected Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs) and contractors about tree-climbing risks and controls • No formal process to ensure officers exercise due diligence under the WHS Act 2011 for high-risk tree work • Fragmented or informal WHS documentation leading to inconsistent decision-making and poor oversight of climbing activities • Failure to integrate arborist climbing risks into the broader organisational WHS management system and risk register	High	• Develop and implement a formal WHS governance framework that explicitly identifies duties for officers, PCBUs, managers, supervisors and workers regarding arborist tree climbing, aligned with the WHS Act 2011 and relevant Regulations, Codes of Practice and Australian Standards • Establish a structured consultation process requiring regular WHS meetings, toolbox talks and pre-season risk review workshops specifically addressing arborist tree access and climbing systems, with documented outcomes and action tracking • Ensure officers demonstrate due diligence by regularly reviewing tree-climbing risk assessments, incident trends, audit reports and training records, and allocating adequate financial and human resources to control risks • Maintain a central, controlled WHS document management system for policies, procedures, safe work guidelines, emergency plans and risk assessments for tree climbing, with version control and scheduled review dates • Formally integrate arborist climbing hazards and controls into the organisation-wide risk register, including defined risk owners, escalation pathways, and periodic management review of risk effectiveness • Implement a process to consult, engage and coordinate with other duty holders (e.g. principal contractors, landowners, utilities) when tree climbing is undertaken on shared sites or near overlapping hazards such as powerlines and public roads	Medium
2. Contractor Management and Procurement of Arborist Services	• Engagement of arborist contractors without verifying qualifications, high-risk work competencies and climbing experience • Selection of contractors based primarily on price, leading to inadequate resourcing, shortcuts in climbing systems and poor supervision • Lack of formal prequalification criteria for tree-climbing contractors, including insurances, WHS systems and incident history • Inadequate assessment of contractor WHS documentation (e.g. risk assessments, emergency plans, rescue capability) before work is awarded • Poor coordination of WHS responsibilities between PCBU and contractors, causing gaps in control of site-specific climbing hazards	High	• Implement a formal contractor prequalification process for arborist tree climbing that requires evidence of appropriate trade qualifications, high-risk competencies, training records, verified experience and references • Develop procurement criteria that weight WHS capability, arboricultural expertise, equipment standards and rescue capacity at least equally with cost, with documented evaluation scores and justification • Require contractors to provide copies of insurances (public liability, professional indemnity where relevant, workers compensation) and confirmation of coverage for tree-climbing operations and aerial rescue • Establish a standard WHS due diligence checklist for arborist contractors, including review of their WHS management system, incident statistics, past enforcement actions, fatigue management, drug and alcohol policies and emergency response arrangements • Use written contracts or service agreements that clearly define shared and overlapping WHS duties, including who will provide climbing equipment, inspection regimes, rescue plans, first aid resources, site inductions and supervision • Periodically review contractor performance through formal audits, site inspections and post-job reviews, with clear corrective action expectations and a process for suspending or removing non-compliant providers	Medium
3. Competency, Training and	• Workers performing tree-climbing tasks without appropriate formal training,	High		Medium

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Authorisation of Arborists	recognised qualifications or demonstrated competency • Inadequate verification of prior experience, resulting in inexperienced climbers undertaking complex or high-risk tree work • Lack of structured training for ground crew in supporting roles such as rope management, traffic control, exclusion zones and emergency response • No formal authorisation system to limit tree-climbing activities to competent and medically fit personnel • Insufficient refresher training leading to skill fade in advanced climbing, aerial rescue, rigging and chainsaw use aloft		• Develop and implement a competency framework for all arborist roles (climber, crew leader, ground crew), referencing relevant national units of competency, industry best practice and manufacturer instructions for climbing systems • Require evidence of formal training and assess[illegible]ent for tree climbing, aerial rescue, chainsaw use in trees, rigging and use of personal fall-arrest [illegible]tems before workers are permitted to conduct unsupervised climbing work • Introduce a structured verification of compete[illegible]OC) process, including practical assessments in typical work scenarios, supervisor sign-off and p[illegible]odic reasses[illegible]ent, with records maintained in a central training register • Establish a formal au[illegible]risatio[illegible]rocedure where o[illegible]workers assessed as competent and medically fit are approved to p[illegible]rm s[illegible]cific c[illegible]bing activities, with authorisation levels (e.g. basic climb, complex climb, near uti[illegible]s) docume[illegible]ed • Provide targe[illegible]d training[illegible] ground cr[illegible]n rope handling, communication protocols, exclusion zones, equip[illegible]t chec[illegible] and[illegible]rticipation in emergency and aerial rescue drills • Sche[illegible]ul[illegible]egular[illegible]resher and update training (e.g. annually or as required by standards, equipment change[illegible]or[illegible]ident l[illegible]nings) on climbing techniques, rescue methods, risk assessment and relevant legislati[illegible]or[illegible]de chan[illegible]s	
4. Health, Fitness for Work and Fatigue Management	• Workers undertaking strenuous tree-climbing tasks with underlying medical conditions that increase the likelihood of sudden incapacity aloft • Inadequate screenin[illegible]physical fitness, leading to m[illegible]sculoskeletal injuries and overex[illegible]tion during climbing operations • Poor fatigue management practices particularly during seasonal peaks[illegible]ng shifts, hot weather or afte[illegible]hour[illegible] emergency call-outs • Workers presenting for tree-climbing duties while affected by drugs, alcohol or medication that may impair judgement, coordination or response times • Lack of policies to manage heat stress, dehydration and environmental exposure for climbers and ground crew	High	[redacted]	Medium
5. Planning, Site Assessment and Job Authorisation	• Tree-climbing activities commencing without a documented, site-specific risk assessment and job plan	High	[redacted]	Medium

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	• Inadequate evaluation of tree condition, structural integrity and environmental factors prior to approving climbing as the access method • Failure to identify and manage external hazards such as overhead powerlines, traffic, unstable ground, underground services, nearby structures and public access routes • Poor communication of job plans, residual risks and control measures to all workers and contractors involved • Lack of a formal permit or authorisation step for complex or high-risk climbs (e.g. near utilities, over structures, dead or decayed trees)		[redacted]	
6. Equipment Procurement, Design and Selection	• Procurement of non-compliant or substandard climbing ropes, harnesses, connectors and fall-arrest equipment [redacted] meeting relevant Australian or international standards • Use of improvised or [redacted] equipment for tree [redacted]bing due to poor purchasing control [redacted]r budget pressures • Inconsistent or inc[redacted] climbi[redacted] systems and hardware across crews, increasing the risk of misuse or configuration errors • Failure to consider ergonomic design, adjustability and user comfort in harness and equipment selection, contributing to fatigue and musculoskeletal strain • Procurement decisions made without consultation with experienced climbers and WHS advisors	High	[redacted]	Low
7. Equipment Inspection, Maintenance and Replacement	• Failure of climbing ropes, harnesses, connectors or anchor hardware due to inadequate inspection or undocumented service history • Use of damaged, contaminated, UV-degraded or out-of-life equipment	High	[redacted]	Low

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	because replacement criteria are unclear or not enforced • Lack of competent persons appointed to inspect, test and approve tree-climbing equipment for ongoing service • Poor storage, cleaning and transport arrangements causing premature degradation or loss of equipment integrity • Inadequate recordkeeping of equipment inspection findings, defects and corrective actions		[redacted]	
8. Work Methods, Systems of Work and Safe Work Procedures	• Inconsistent climbing techniques and work methods between crews, increasing the likelihood of error, miscommunication and incompatible systems being used together • Absence of documented safe system of work for different types of tree-climbing operations [illegible]ding ascent, work positio[illegible]g, rigging, cutting aloft and descent • Inadequate consi[illegible]ratio[illegible] dropped-object risks, [illegible]wing-fall pote[illegible]al and load-sharing when planning climbing systems • Reliance on informal practices rather than documented procedures that are reviewed and updated over time • Insufficient controls around simultaneous operations such as rigging, cutting, traffic management and public interface while climbers are aloft	High	[redacted]	Medium
9. Supervision, Leadership and Competent Oversight	• Arborist crews operating without adequately competent supervision, leading to poor decision-making and tolerance of unsafe practices • Supervisors lacking specific arboricultural and climbing experience,	High	[redacted]	Medium

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	resulting in ineffective challenge to unsafe methods • Inconsistent enforcement of WHS policies, PPE requirements and equipment inspection practices between different supervisors • Insufficient field verification that documented procedures are actually implemented during tree-climbing operations • Failure to intervene or stop work when conditions change or risks escalate (e.g. weather deterioration, unexpected tree defects, public encroachment)		[redacted]	
10. Emergency Preparedness, Aerial Rescue and First Aid	• Inability to promptly rescue an incapacitated or injured climber due to lack of trained rescuers, equipment or rehearsed procedures • Over-reliance on external emergency services without realistic consideration of response times and ac[illegible] limitations at remote or complex [illegible]es • Inadequate site-s[illegible]ecific emergency planning, including [illegible]mmu[illegible]h emergency services [illegible]dentificatio[illegible]f landing zones or access points • Ground crew unfamiliar with th[illegible]roles in an aerial rescue scenario, leading to delays and confusion during a critical incident • Insufficient first aid capability, including absence of appropriately trained first aiders or lack of suitable first aid equipment for tree-work injuries	High	[redacted]	Medium
11. Environmental and Public Interface Management	• Public entering exclusion zones beneath or near climbers due to inadequate barriers, signage or supervision • Falling branches, tools or equipment striking vehicles, pedestrians, buildings	High	[redacted]	Medium

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	or infrastructure adjacent to the work area • Insufficient coordination with road authorities or utilities when tree climbing occurs near roads, footpaths, cycleways or powerlines • Noise, dust and debris from tree work causing nuisance or health impacts to neighbouring properties or sensitive receivers • Failure to consider wildlife, protected species or environmental conditions that might alter tree behaviour or stability during climbing		[redacted]	
12. Monitoring, Incident Management and Continuous Improvement	• Recurring tree-climbing incidents an near misses due to inadequate analys and follow-up action • Under-reporting of ha nsafe conditions and low-l el incidents because workers d not trust or understand the rep ting sy • Lack of performance indicators and trend analysis specific to arborist tree-climbing risks • Failure to update procedures, training and equipment specifications in response to new information, technology or regulatory change • Ineffective internal audit and inspection programs that overlook systemic weaknesses in climbing operations	High	[redacted]	Low

EMERGENCY RESPONSE – CALL 000 FOR EMERGENCIES

Ensure to have an Emergency Management Plan in place as well as adequate numbers of trained first aid staff with easy access to fully stocked first aid kits, rescue equipment, material safety data sheets, adequate access to emergency communication equipment and fire-fighting equipment suitable for all classes of fire and ignition sources.

LEGISLATIVE REFERENCES

RELEVANT LEGISLATION AND CODES OF PRACTICE. DELETE THE LEGISLATIVE REFERENCES FOR ANY STATE THAT ARE NOT APPLICABLE

Queensland & Australian Capital Territory
Work Health and Safety Act 2011
Work Health and Safety Regulations 2011
Legislation QLD: https://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au/laws-and-compliance/work-health-and-safety-laws
Codes of Practice QLD: https://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au/laws-and-compliance/codes-of-practice
Legislation ACT: https://www.worksafe.act.gov.au/laws-and-compliance/acts-and-regulations
Codes of Practice ACT: https://www.worksafe.act.gov.au/laws-and-compliance/codes-of-practice

New South Wales
Work Health and Safety Act 2011
Work Health and Safety Regulations 2025
Legislation NSW: https://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/legal-obligations/legislation
Codes of Practice NSW: https://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/resource-library/list-of-codes-of-practice

Northern Territory
Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Act 2011
Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Regulations 2011
Legislation NT: https://worksafe.nt.gov.au/laws-and-compliance/workplace-safety-laws
Codes of Practice NT: https://worksafe.nt.gov.au/forms-and-resources/codes-of-practice

South Australia
Work Health and Safety Act 2012 (SA)
Work Health and Safety Regulations 2012 (SA)
Legislation for SA: https://www.safework.sa.gov.au/resources/legislation
Codes of Practice for SA: https://www.safework.sa.gov.au/workplaces/codes-of-practice#COPs

Tasmania
Work Health and Safety Act 2012
Work Health and Safety (Transitional and Consequential Provisions) Act 2012
Work Health and Safety Regulations 2012
Work Health and Safety (Transitional) Regulations 2012
Legislation for TAS: https://worksafe.tas.gov.au/topics/laws-and-compliance/acts-and-regulations
Codes of Practice for TAS: https://worksafe.tas.gov.au/topics/laws-and-compliance/codes-of-practice

Details of permits, licenses or access required by regulatory bodies (add or delete as required):

- Permits from local council
- Authorisation to commence work
- Any required documents.

Victoria
Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004
Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2017
Legislation VIC: https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/occupational-health-and-safety-act-and-regulations
Codes of Practice VIC: https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/compliance-codes-and-codes-practice

Western Australia
Work Health and Safety Act 2020
Work Health and Safety Regulations 2022
Legislation Western Australia: https://www.commerce.wa.gov.au/worksafe/legislation
Codes of Practice WA: https://www.commerce.wa.gov.au/worksafe/codes-practice

Safe Work Australia Links
Law and Regulation (All States): https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/law-and-regulation
Model Codes of Practice: https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/resources-publications/model-codes-of-practice

Model Codes of Practice

- Managing noise and preventing hearing loss at work
- Confined spaces
- Labelling of workplace hazardous chemicals
- Managing risks of hazardous chemicals in the workplace
- Welding processes
- First aid in the workplace
- Managing the risk of falls at workplaces
- Hazardous manual tasks
- Managing the risk of falls in housing construction
- Managing electrical risks in the workplace
- Demolition work
- Excavation work
- Work health and safety consultation, cooperation and coordination
- Managing the work environment and facilities
- How to manage work health and safety risks
- Managing risks of plant in the workplace
- Construction work