

Special bulletin for Yorkshire and North East Area

Storm Arwen – Impact on Woodlands and Forests

It is almost two weeks since storm Arwen ripped through the North East and Cumbria, leaving significant damage in its wake. We are still gathering information on the extent of the damage to woodlands and forests but from what we know so far thousands of hectares have been impacted representing something in the region of perhaps a million cubic metres of timber. Whatever the final numbers, it is clear that this is a significant event for the forestry sector in Scotland and northern England.

The first and most important things to say is that we hope those of you that sustained damage to your houses, experienced access challenges or lost power are now recovering and life is beginning to return to normal. I know that our colleagues in Forestry England and many private foresters have worked tirelessly this last week in clearing roads of windblown trees to reinstate access for people and to enable delivery of vital materials, services and provisions. We are all very grateful for this effort.

As we move from the immediate aftermath to considering planning the clear-up there are some key things that are important to consider:

1. Stay Safe!

Dealing with windblown trees is a difficult and potentially dangerous task and it requires a high level of technical skill and the right PPE, equipment and machinery. Please do not attempt to deal with windblow unless you have had the requisite training and are confident that you have the skills and equipment to safely perform the task. The [Forestry Industry Safety Accord \(FISA\)](#) provide lots of valuable information on this that we strongly encourage everyone to follow.

2. Owners' liability

Please remember that landowners are responsible for taking reasonable steps to ensure the safety of those working in, walking across or otherwise visiting their land. Consider this in planning your clear-up operations, dealing first with those trees that present the greatest hazard.

3. Do I need a felling licence to clear windblow?

- A felling licence is not required to fell trees that are no longer growing such as those uprooted and blown over or snapped by the wind or are dead or dangerous.

- Standing trees within an area of windblow will require a felling licence, if not otherwise exempt because they are, for example, dead or dangerous.
- The felling of trees adjacent to areas of windblow also requires a licence, if not otherwise exempt.
- If, on the basis of the above, you think a licence is not required because of an exemption, please keep a record of your decisions and photographs before you start tackling the area of windblow.
- Full details of the exemptions available and how to apply for a felling licence are included on our [website](#). If you are in any doubt whether a licence is required please contact your Agent or [local Woodland Officer](#).

In addition to the above, please consider that your timber buyer may want to see evidence that you have a felling licence to evidence that the felling is legal for chain of custody reasons.

4. Part of the woodland on which I have a grant scheme has blown down – what should I do?

You may have an approved Higher Tier woodland scheme through which you are receiving annual payments for managing it as per the agreement. If it is no longer possible for you to continue to manage the woodland in the way described in this agreement, because of this windblow event, you should write to the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) and simultaneously [contact your Woodland Officer](#) to discuss and plan next steps. Force majeure may apply. You can also find useful information and contact details on Section 18 of your agreement terms and conditions or Annex1 of the relevant CS Manual.

5. What about the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations?

Deforestation is subject to the Forestry EIA regulations. This means that whilst clearance of trees that have blown flat may not require a felling licence, subsequent conversion of that woodland or part of that woodland to another land use (such as an agricultural field) is subject to the Forestry EIA regulations in most situations. In some circumstances we could require such deforestation to be reversed.

6. Deadwood

Whilst we would wish to see the vast majority of windblown and damaged trees harvested, as would many of you I'm sure, do consider retaining some snapped or damaged trees to form deadwood; this is a valuable wildlife habitat. Equally, consider retaining a small number of blown trees in those difficult to reach places, as long as they are safe. This is also a valuable wildlife habitat – many of our woodlands and forests contain less deadwood than natural forests.

7. Tree Diseases and Timber Value

Often the best way to minimise the risk and impact of tree diseases is to grow trees that are well suited to the site and well managed so they are thriving.. Much like in humans, stress often adversely impacts trees' capability to withstand pests and diseases. So, it is not wise to leave large areas of wind-snapped or windblown trees in a forest for a long period as this invites a pest and disease problem which could spread to nearby heathy woodlands and forests.

Timber processors generally prefer freshly felled timber, particular sawmillers. For example, pine left for several months is likely to develop blue stain which often reduces its value. Deterioration is generally slower in winter than summer, indeed the white-wood hardwoods are normally felled in winter as once the sap begins to rise stain is often a problem. Snapped trees should generally be a higher priority than blown, when considering tree disease and timber degrade. Blown spruce, with at least part of the root plate still in contact with the soil, is unlikely to degrade for many months so there is no great rush in getting to these. It's worth bearing in mind all of the above in planning your clear-up operations.

8. Forestry Commission Capacity to process Felling Licence applications and Enquiries

We recognise that there is very likely to be a significant increase in the number of licences for us to process and enquiries for us to deal with. We are currently looking to increase our capacity through the use of short-term agency staff and are in the process of recruiting more woodland officers. *If you feel you have the necessary skills and would like to discuss contract/agency opportunities please contact Sam.cooper@forestrycommission.gov.uk'*

We are also exploring the possibility of removing the requirement for certain felling licences to be placed on the public register for 28 days, much as we have done for licences related to felling necessary for tree health reasons. More on this in due course.

9. Help from you in assessing the amount and location of damage

Finally, we are very keen to work with foresters, land owners and sector bodies, such as ConFor, the CLA and ICF, to coordinate collection of information to ascertain the true nature and scale of this windblow event, and to work collectively, where appropriate, in dealing with it. There is a special meeting of the Northern England Forestry Professionals Group on 13 December where we will talk more about this. If you wish to join this meeting please contact richard.pow@forestrycommission.gov.uk

We are using a variety of sources of information including working with Forest Research to use earth observation satellite data. There is an invitation in our national E-Alert that was distributed earlier today inviting woodland owners and managers to contribute to this information gathering. Details as follows:

To help us improve our understanding of the economic and environmental damage caused by the storm we would like you to share information you have on damage sustained by woodlands you own or manage. If you would like to help us please take a minute to answer these questions:

- What is the six figure Ordnance Survey grid reference and postcode for the location of your woodland?
- What is the total estimated area and volume of windthrow across the holding (if there is more than one woodland on the holding, please submit the sum area and sum volume damaged)?
- What main tree species are present in the damaged woodland?
- Do you have a current felling licence for the affected woodland?
- Do you plan to harvest or remove the windblown trees?
- Do you have any plans to restock the site?
- Do you have a windblow recovery plan for the sites affected?

Please send your responses to storm.arwen@forestrycommission.gov.uk by the 23 January 2022. We aim to produce a map and short report describing the impact of Storm Arwen in late February and will share key findings via [eAlert](#).