



**FOREST SERVICE HANDBOOK
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FSH 6709.12 - SAFETY AND HEALTH PROGRAM HANDBOOK

CHAPTER 10 - SAFETY AND HEALTH PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

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Associate Deputy Chief

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Digest:

18 - 18.7 - Establishes new direction on the Forest Service Tree Climbing Program to protect Forest Service employees while ascending, descending, and working aloft in trees. Sets forth minimum national requirements for all Forest Service tree climbing operations and activities, except for smokejumper operations; for the use of associated equipment based on recognized industry standards, practices, and procedures; and for training and certification requirements.

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18 - TREE CLIMBING PROGRAM

1. The Forest Service Tree Climbing Program provides direction that protects Forest Service employees while ascending, descending, and working aloft in trees by establishing national direction based on recognized industry standards, procedures, and practices.

2. This section provides:

a. Minimum requirements for all Forest Service operations and activities involving tree climbing.

b. Minimum requirements for the use of associated equipment to accomplish project work and activities and research missions and functions, except for tree climbing in support of smokejumper wildland fire suppression operations and activities. (See the Interagency Smokejumper Operations Guide for direction on tree climbing related to fire suppression.)

3. The terms "Tree Climber Trainee," "Tree Climber," and "Tree Climber Instructor" used in this section apply to Forest Service employees, unless otherwise stated.

18.02 - Objective

1. To ensure that Forest Service tree climbers are properly trained, certified, and equipped to safely accomplish required work projects and activities involving the ascent, descent, and working aloft in trees with approved equipment.

2. To ensure that the safest tree climbing techniques and practices adopted by the National Tree Climbing Technical Advisory Group (sec. 18.08) or other recognized authorities are used in common tree climbing practices.

18.03 - Policy

1. Forest Service tree climbing operations and activities must comply with direction of this handbook, the National Tree Climbing Guide (sec. 18.06) and, Forest Service Handbook 6709.11, section 22.49.

2. Only Forest Service employees who hold a valid tree climbing certification card issued by the Forest Service (sec. 18.4) may engage in tree climbing.

3. All tree climbers must be trained and certified before commencing work projects and activities (sections 18.3 and 18.4).

4. Tree climbers must use only the techniques and equipment they are certified to use.

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5. Tree climbing work must be performed by a climbing team consisting of at least a ground person and a climber who are both qualified to perform the climbing assignment.
6. Free climbing, using the three-point climbing technique, is only authorized while:
 - a. Ascending and/or descending a tree where the density of the limbs or branches inhibits the installation of a lanyard or climbing line.
 - b. Ascending and/or descending a secured ladder to gain access to the live crown of a tree.
7. Tree climbers using the three-point climbing technique must be tied in when stopping or resting during free climbing.
8. Follow recommendations of an emergency nature from the National Tree Climbing Technical Advisory Group if they are sent to the field by the OSOH Director through the National Tree Climbing Program Manager.

18.04 - Responsibility

18.04a - Washington Office Deputy Chief for Business Operations

The Deputy Chief for Business Operations, as the Designated Agency Safety and Health Official, is responsible for acting upon recommendations from the National Tree Climbing Technical Advisory Group (sec. 18.08) for tree climbing policies that affect the work environment and safety of employees.

18.04b - Director, Office of Safety and Occupational Health

The Director, Office of Safety and Occupational Health, Washington Office, is responsible for:

1. Providing overall program policy and safety oversight for the Forest Service Tree Climbing Program.
2. Serving as the Washington Office representative for the National Tree Climbing Technical Advisory Group.

18.04c - National Tree Climbing Program Manager

The National Tree Climbing Program Manager, Dorena Genetic Resource Center, Umpqua National Forest, is responsible for:

1. Coordinating Region, Station, the Area, and the Institute tree climbing training and certification programs and managing day-to-day operations of the Forest Service Tree Climbing Program.

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2. Serving as the chairperson, or designating a chairperson on the National Tree Climbing Technical Advisory Group.
3. Developing and maintaining a national tracking system for pertinent information on all tree climbers on a servicewide basis, including name; location; telephone number; electronic mail address; certification and recertification date(s); type of certification; qualifications; skill level; and annual training experience.
4. Assisting in the investigation and documentation of tree climbing accidents and violations of the Forest Service Tree Climbing Program, and/or serving as a technical expert or member on boards of review.
5. Developing and maintaining a National Tree Climbing Program web site linked to Forest Service and USDA websites (<http://www.fs.fed.us/treeclimbing/>).
6. Serving as liaison with Federal, State, and other agencies on tree climbing matters.
7. Conducting and coordinating annual training workshops for certification of tree climber trainees, tree climbers, and tree climbing instructors.

18.04d - Regional Foresters, Station Directors, Area Director, and Institute Director

In units where employees are engaged in established tree climbing operations and activities, Regional Foresters, Station Directors, the Area Director, and the Institute Director are responsible for:

1. Officially appointing Regional, Station, Area, and Institute tree climbing coordinators in writing.
2. Ensuring that sufficient resources are available to manage a safe and effective tree climbing program.

18.04e - Region, Station, Area, and Institute Tree Climbing Coordinators

Region, Station, Area, and Institute Tree Climbing Coordinators are responsible for:

1. Maintaining a thorough working knowledge of Forest Service Tree Climbing Program policy and technical guidelines and basic tree climbing techniques and practices.
2. Ensuring their program's compliance with the requirements of the Forest Service tree climbing program policy in this section and the technical guidelines contained in the National Tree Climbing Guide (referenced in sec. 18.06).

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3. Ensuring the operational effectiveness and performance of tree climbing programs under their control, and adherence to agency policy and technical guidelines.
4. Serving on the National Tree Climbing Technical Advisory Group.
5. Coordinating tree climber trainee, tree climber, and tree climbing instructor training and certification.
6. Entering data into the agency's national tracking system for information on all tree climbers (based at the Dorena Genetic Resource Center), including name; location; telephone number; electronic mail address; certification and recertification date(s); type of certification; qualifications; skill level; and annual training and experience.
7. Complying with operational and technical advisories and alerts issued by the National Tree Climbing Technical Advisory Group or National Tree Climbing Program Manager.
8. Suspending tree climbing operations and activities that are considered unsafe or unwise.
9. Recommending to issuing officials the revocation or suspension of tree climbing certificates when appropriate (sec. 18.46).
10. Appointing tree climbing technical advisors for the respective Region, Station, the Area, and the Institute, as deemed necessary.
11. Assisting in the investigation and documentation of tree climbing accidents and violations of the Forest Service Tree Climbing Program policy and technical guidelines, or serving as a technical expert or member on boards of review.

18.04f - Tree Climbing Technical Advisors

Tree Climbing Technical Advisors are responsible for:

1. Maintaining their status as tree climbing instructors and a thorough knowledge of and adherence to basic tree climbing techniques and to the Forest Service Tree Climbing Program policy and technical guidelines.
2. Serving as a member of the National Tree Climbing Technical Advisory Group.
3. Participating in tree climbing instructor training and certification.
4. Suspending tree climbing operations that are considered unsafe or unwise.
5. Recommending approval for certification of tree climbing instructors.

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6. Serving as a member of an investigation team or board of review to assist in investigations of tree climbing accidents or violations of requirements of the Forest Service Tree Climbing Program policy and technical guidelines.

7. Obtaining recertification through the Dorena Genetic Resource Center every three years.

18.04g - Forest Supervisors

Forest Supervisors at units with established tree climbing programs are responsible for:

1. Appointing Forest or Zone Tree Climbing Coordinators based on recommendations of Regional Tree Climbing Coordinators and/or the National Tree Climbing Technical Advisory Group.

2. Providing adequate resources for implementing a safe and effective tree climbing program.

18.04h - Forest or Zone Tree Climbing Coordinators

Forest or Zone Tree Climbing Coordinators are responsible for:

1. Maintaining a thorough working knowledge of and adherence to basic tree climbing techniques and practices and to the Forest Service Tree Climbing Program policy and technical guidelines.

2. Ensuring operational effectiveness and performance of the Forest or Zone tree climbing program, including the conduct of training and certification and the compliance with requirements of the Forest Service Tree Climbing Program.

3. Providing pertinent information on Forest or Zone tree climbers to the Regional Tree Climbing Coordinator. This information should include name; location; telephone number; electronic mail address; certification and recertification date(s); type of certification; qualifications; skill level; and annual training and experience.

4. Suspending tree climbing operations and activities that are considered unsafe or unwise.

5. Recommending to issuing officials the revocation or suspension of certificates (sec. 18.46).

6. Assisting in the investigation and documentation of tree climbing accidents and violations of the Forest Service Tree Climbing Program policy and technical guidelines, or serving as a technical expert or a member on boards of review at the request of the Regional Tree Climbing Coordinator.

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18.04i - Tree Climbing Instructors

Tree Climbing Instructors are responsible for:

1. Conducting tree climbing training and certification in accordance with section 18.4 and the guidelines contained in the National Tree Climbing Guide.
2. Maintaining qualifications for the type of instruction they are certified to perform.
3. Providing pertinent information regarding tree climbing training to Forest, Zone and Regional Tree Climbing Coordinators. This information should include date and location of training and trainees' names; location; telephone number; electronic mail address; type(s) of certification; qualifications; and skill level.
4. Signing the "Instructor" block on Form FS-6700-37, Tree Climbing Certification Card, for qualified applicants, and submitting the completed cards to the issuing official for validation (sec. 18.46).
5. Maintaining currency as an instructor by attending a regional tree climbing instructor workshop every 3 years.
6. Acquiring annual tree climbing experience through workshops, practice sessions, or production climbing.

18.04j - Tree Climbers

Tree Climbers are responsible for:

1. Maintaining current certification and proficiency for the type of tree climbing work to be performed and a thorough working knowledge of and adherence to Forest Service Tree Climbing Program policy, techniques, practices, and technical guidelines.
2. Planning climbing operations and activities in accordance with the requirements set out in this section and the technical guidelines in the National Tree Climbing Guide.
3. Ensuring that safety and emergency equipment is operable, in good condition, and accessible at climbing sites prior to each climb.
4. Suspending tree climbing operations and activities that are considered unsafe or unwise.

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5. Refusing to climb, if, in their judgment, climbing conditions or available equipment are perceived as unfavorable and/or would violate the precepts of training or the requirements in this section.

6. Recertifying every 3 years.

18.04k - Contracting Officers

Contracting Officers are responsible for:

1. Incorporating the requirements listed in section 18.07 into contracts for tree climbing work conducted within National Forest System boundaries or other lands and properties administered by the Forest Service.

2. Ensuring that all tree climbing contracts are reviewed by a certified tree climber or qualified Contracting Officer Representative for safety and resource protection issues before they are released for solicitation.

18.04m - Contracting Officer Representatives

Contracting Officer Representatives and inspectors designated to administer tree climbing contracts are responsible for acquiring sufficient knowledge in current tree climbing practices in order to properly execute the provisions of such contracts (reference National Tree Climbing Guide, sec. 18.06).

18.05 - Definitions

Refer to section 1.5 of the National Tree Climbing Guide for definitions of technical terms related to tree climbing.

Evaluating Facilitator. A Certified Tree Climbing Instructor appointed by the National Tree Climbing Program Manager or a Regional Tree Climbing Coordinator to evaluate and certify the tree climbing skills and teaching abilities of Tree Climbing Instructor candidates.

Issuing Official. The National Tree Climbing Program Manager, Regional Coordinator, Technical Advisor or Unit Leader.

Three-Point Climbing Technique. The basic tree climbing method whereby three points of contact on secure surfaces are constantly maintained. Potential points of contact include each hand or foot, or a properly attached lanyard.

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18.06 - References

1. National Tree Climbing Guide, Missoula Technology and Development Center (MTDC), Missoula, MT, sets forth the technical guidelines, for tree climbing, including accepted tree climbing techniques, practices, procedures, and associated equipment. Available through MTDC at: wo_mtdc_pubs@fs.fed.us

2. Interagency Smokejumper Operations Guide (http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/aviation/av_library/).

3. American National Standards Institute (ANSI) documents (Available through ANSI at: <http://www.ansi.org/>):

- a. ANSI A10-14, Requirements for Safety Belts, Harnesses, Lifelines and Drop Lines for Construction and Industrial Use.
- b. ANSI Z133.1, Arboricultural Operations.

18.07 - Requirements for Tree Climbing Contracts

Forest Service Contracting officers shall include the following requirements in contracts for tree climbing operations and activities conducted on National Forest System lands or on other lands and properties administered by the Forest Service (sec. 18.04k):

1. The Contractor shall comply with the safety requirements of this handbook, the National Tree Climbing Guide and, FSH 6709.11, Health and Safety Code Handbook, section 22.49. At the request of the Contractor, alternate procedures may be approved by the Contracting Officer that meet the intent of Forest Service safety requirements, but differ in actual practice.

2. The contractor shall follow all Federal, State, and local safety laws and regulations applicable to the contract work to be performed.

3. The contractor shall:

- a. Provide a statement of technical capability and the number of years the contractor has performed tree climbing work.
- b. Document the qualifications or skill level of individual personnel who will execute the provisions of the contract.
- c. Specify the techniques and safety practices planned and/or equipment to be used for the contract.

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18.08 - National Tree Climbing Technical Advisory Group

The National Tree Climbing Technical Advisory Group, composed of the National Tree Climbing Program Manager (sec. 18.04c), the Tree Climbing Coordinators at the Regions, Stations, the Area, and the Institute (sec. 18.04f), and Tree Climbing Technical Advisors (sec.18.04g), performs the following:

1. Provides program recommendations to the National Tree Climbing Program Manager.
2. Provides operational and technical advice to Forest Service tree climbers.
3. Serves as a board of appeal on issues relating to tree climbing.
4. Recommends changes to the Forest Service Tree Climbing Program policy in FSH 6709.12, Chapter 10 and to the technical guidelines referenced in the National Tree Climbing Guide.
5. Establishes and/or approves tree climbing training programs through which applicants for certification can satisfy the requirements of section 18.3 and 18.4.
6. Establishes criteria for equipment selection, approval, and use.
7. Approves the use of new equipment, techniques, and practices.
8. Addresses national issues at annual national tree climbing workshops.

18.1 - General Standards

1. A job hazard analysis (JHA; form FS-6700-7) must be prepared, reviewed, and signed by each member of the climbing team prior to commencing any climbing operation and activities.

2. Establish checkout procedures with the local sending unit, and make radio contact with the unit after the climbing team reaches its climbing area. Reestablish communications for any move made from the original climbing area to a new location, especially if a higher than normal level of risk is involved.

3. Tree climbers should maintain a climbing log as a record of experience for advancement from one certification level to the next, and make logs available to Regional Tree Climbing Coordinators upon request. Records of experience should contain the following information:

- a. Date of climb.
- b. Number of trees climbed.

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- c. Purpose of climb.
- d. Tree species and size.
- e. Techniques and equipment used.

18.2 - Equipment

18.21 - General Requirements

1. Basic tree climbing equipment must consist of components that are necessary to accomplish the desired climbing assignment and that meet the safety standards specified in the National Tree Climbing Guide and FSH 6709.11, Health and Safety Code Handbook, section 22.49c.

2. Set aside equipment intended for tree climbing operations and activities and use it only for these purposes.

- 3. Inspect equipment prior to each use.
- 4. Clean and properly store equipment after use.

18.22 - New Equipment

1. New equipment or techniques not specifically mentioned in the National Tree Climbing Guide or FSH 6709.11, Health and Safety Code Handbook, section 22.49c, may only be used in tree climbing operations and activities when the new equipment or techniques:

- a. Are approved in writing, by the Regional Tree Climbing Coordinator and technical advisor(s).
- b. Meet the applicable standards set forth in ANSI A10.32 and Z133.1 (referenced in section 18.06) or by a nationally recognized testing and certification organization.
- c. Are defined in the job hazard analysis (JHA).

2. New equipment, techniques, and practices meeting the intent of the standards specified in paragraph 1b of section 18.22 may also be approved by the National Tree Climbing Technical Advisory Group for agency-wide application and use.

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18.3 - Training

1. Regions, Stations, the Area, and the Institute with established tree climbing programs must provide training to tree climbers. Contact the National Tree Climbing Program Manager, Dorena Genetic Resource Center, for assistance to units in developing and/or providing training programs.

2. Trainees must pass a written or verbal examination that demonstrates knowledge of at least the following:

- a. Safety requirements set forth in the National Tree Climbing Guide and FSH 6709.11, Health and Safety Code Handbook, section 22.49.
- b. Identifying, mitigating and/or reporting hazards associated with tree climbing work.
- c. Function, care, use, and maintenance of tree climbing equipment.

3. Trainees must satisfy the Tree Climbing Instructor of their ability to safely perform the following minimum requirements based on the National Tree Climbing Guide after completion of the written or verbal examination:

- a. Successfully tie all task specific knots.
- b. Demonstrate proficiency in free climbing using the three-point climbing technique, including installation of a lanyard and limbing-over on a task specific basis.
- c. Perform an aerial rescue using an approved rappel system.

18.4 - Certification

Only Government employees who are properly trained in tree climbing under the requirements of the Forest Service Tree Climbing Program are eligible for Forest Service certification.

18.41 - Prerequisites

Applicants for tree climbing certification must:

1. Possess an American Red Cross first aid certification or equivalent.
2. Demonstrate the required knowledge and skills of the certification level for which they have applied.

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18.42 - Duration

Tree climbing certification cards are valid for a period not to exceed 3 years from the day of issuance.

18.43 - Levels of Certification

1. Tree Climber Trainee. This level of certification signifies that an applicant has successfully completed a basic climbing course. Upon certification, the trainee must climb with an experienced Tree Climber for a minimum of one climbing season during which time the trainee ascends a minimum of 10 trees.

- a. Upon review of the Tree Climber Trainee's accumulation of experience, a Tree Climbing Instructor may upgrade the Trainee's certification to Tree Climber.
- b. This review may include verification of experience and skill level from the Trainee's supervisor or an experienced team member, and may require demonstration of proficiency to the satisfaction of the instructor.
- c. The upgraded certification is valid through the original expiration date.

2. Tree Climber. This level of certification signifies that a Tree Climber Trainee has successfully completed the requirements set out in paragraph 1 of section 18.43, and has demonstrated tree climbing proficiency and skill.

3. Tree Climbing Instructor. This level of certification signifies that a Tree Climber has successfully completed a basic tree climbing instructor training workshop, and has met the approval of the evaluating facilitator(s).

18.44 - Tree Climbing Certification Card

Form FS-6700-37 (5/03), Tree Climbing Certification Card is issued to qualified applicants as evidence of qualification. The Tree Climbing Certification Card shall be issued for the following levels of certifications and categories for which applicants are qualified:

1. Level of certification:
 - a. Tree Climber Trainee.
 - b. Tree Climber.
 - c. Tree Climbing Instructor.

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2. Categories of equipment, techniques, and tree type(s) may include, but are not limited to:

- a. 3-point climbing (required).
- b. Knots-task specific (required).
- c. Rescue (required).
- d. Body thrust.
- e. Secured footlock.
- f. Friction knot systems.
- g. 4-inch tie-in system.
- h. Ladders (sectional and/or orchard).
- i. Climbing spurs.
- j. Ascenders.
- k. Rappel rack.
- l. Sky Genie.
- m. Rescue-8 rappel.
- n. Swiss tree grippers.

3. Tree Hazard Assessment (required). (See sec. 2.4 of the National Tree Climbing Guide, referenced in 18.06 for more detailed information on tree hazards and hazard tree climbing.)

4. Any specialty climbing categories, identified in section 18.51, for which the climber has been trained and qualified to use and/or instruct.

18.45 - Tree Climbing Certification Card Validation

Validation of Tree Climbing Certification Cards, Form FS-6700-37, for applicants who have successfully completed training, requires the following signatures corresponding to the level of certification:

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1. Tree Climber Trainee. The instructor conducting basic tree climbing training signs in the "Instructor" signature block and the Unit Leader signs in the "Issuing Official" signature block.
2. Tree Climber. The instructor approving the eligibility of a tree climber trainee to advance to the Tree Climber level signs in the "Instructor" signature block and the Unit Leader signs in the "Issuing Official" signature block.
3. Tree Climbing Instructor. An evaluating facilitator signs in the "Instructor" signature block and the National Tree Climbing Program Manager, or designee, signs in the "Issuing Official" signature block.

18.46 - Revocation and Suspension

1. Certification cards may be revoked or suspended by the issuing official, if Tree Climber Trainees, Tree Climbers, or Tree Climbing Instructors:
 - a. Fail to conform to the required knowledge and skills of the certification level for which they are certified.
 - b. Demonstrate unsafe climbing habits.
 - c. Are responsible for serious violations of Forest Service Tree Climbing Program requirements set out in this section; FSH 6709.11, Health and Safety Code Handbook, section 2.49; or technical guidelines contained in the National Tree Climbing Guide.
2. Thoroughly document all revocations and suspensions of certification cards and tree climbing operations and activities.

18.47 - Recertification

Tree climber qualifications are valid for 3 years from the date of issuance, unless terminated sooner for violation of tree climbing policy, or at the discretion of the Tree Climbing Coordinator for serious and/or repeated violations of safety practices and procedures.

18.5 - Specialty Climbing

Because specialty climbing entails tree climbing work that requires additional skill levels to safely perform, Tree Climbers must receive proper training and certification prior to engaging in specialty climbing work. Qualified Tree Climbers must have the appropriate specialty climbing endorsements annotated on their Tree Climbing Certification Card.

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18.51 - Types of Specialty Climbing

1. Tree Topping with Explosives. (See sec. 4.4 of the National Tree Climbing Guide for certification requirements, and safe handling and use of explosives in trees.)
2. Chain Saw Use in Trees. (See sec. 4.5 of the National Tree Climbing Guide for certification requirements, and safe handling and operation of chain saws in trees.)

18.6 - Accident Investigations

Report tree climbing accidents resulting in serious injury through appropriate channels in accordance with Forest Service accident/incident reporting and notification requirements set forth in FSM 6700.