

CORPORATE HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE – 12TH APRIL 2006

SUBJECT: GRASS MOWING OPERATIONS ON EMBANKMENTS

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND LEISURE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform members, management and trade union safety representatives of the proposals in relation to mowing operations on embankments. This follows a request at the last safety committee following concerns expressed by trade union representatives of the current practices adopted in Parks Operations.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The present operations to most embankment areas were established in the former Authorities before 1996. Each area is different in its locality, degree of steepness, stability and frequency of maintenance.
- 2.2 Each embankment has a different client funder with clients requiring maintenance for different reasons, be this appearance or in the case of the Chief Highways Engineer the public's safety on adjacent highways.
- 2.3 All embankment areas including the present grounds maintenance contracts are maintained by Parks employees using a range of machinery. Maintenance machinery includes small ride-on tractors, motorised pedestrian mowers, strimmer brush cutters and occasionally tractor flail mowers.
- 2.4 The different machinery is used due to a variety of reasons safety of operation and operatives being the two main reasons, risk assessments were undertaken sometime ago using supervisors and team leaders and the head of grounds maintenance. Agreed methods are adopted and routinely completed by the teams unless the nature or circumstances, which impact on the operation, change. This maybe for such circumstances as wetness of the area, fences/railings erected adjacent or particularly at the base of the area, this would particularly impact on the safe runoff in cases where ride-on mowers are used. Regularly these changes are short-term but where they are of a permanent nature the supervisor in conjunction with the team leader or operator agrees a change in approach.
- 2.5 Training to ride-on operators and other operatives in the teams is provided via a specific training service on set machinery on embankments, this in particular covers ride-on machinery and the use of trimmers. Whilst the size and type of these two mowing tools are vastly different, each when operated on an embankment has its own safety concerns, as such specific training sessions have been commissioned on each, using an approved trainer from the Agricultural Training Board. Each training session follows the lead bodies approved program and successful completion is recorded with a certificate.
- 2.6 Following the concerns raised at the previous safety committee a meeting has taken place with the Senior Health & Safety Officer (Education and Leisure) and managers from Parks

Operations. Following inspection of the current records, in particular risk assessments, a series of measures and action plans have been proposed and accepted by both sides.

The action plan includes the following: –

- The identification of each embankment included in the contract likely to be of concern to the team, the supervisor and safety representative.
- Within each maintenance team locality a small team comprising the safety representative from Education, supervisor and team leader would inspect each area and agree a new risk assessment together with a method statement on each area. The method statement would include type of machinery and mode of operation to be used in the future.
- In addition the group would identify any follow-up training required for any team members as a result of both risk assessment and/or the method statement.
- All agreed risk assessments and method statements would be kept in the department with copies in the depot, with supervisor, team leader and in the team or where a static groundsman is employed with this person.
- Any changes to either of the risk assessment or method statement due to changes with the embankment or its surroundings, would be agreed between supervisor and team and if felt required the Safety Officer in Education and Leisure. This may involve a further visit to the area by the team.
- Any examples of breach of the agreed methods of operation would be reported to the manager for dealing with under the council's disciplinary procedure.
- Any new embankment areas to be adopted into the current contracts would also receive the same procedures, as outlined above.

2.7 The new proposals may where safety remains a concern within the group include the employment of a contractor to cut the area using a tractor and flail mounted mower, this operation may result in less of the area being actually cut and each area being cut on a reduced frequency.

2.8 The action plan, as outlined above would also be communicated to all supervisors and team leaders employed within parks Services.

2.9 In circumstances where a major change to the current operation is agreed following the adoption of the above action plan and as a result the new method is likely to cost the contractor considerably more in costs, the client for the same area be approached to seek agreement for payment of the new procedure on each and every future occasion. Where the client officer feels the new method is not affordable having in mind the number of areas that may arise, the area may be left unmaintained and with regard to the appearance or nature of the area be considered for naturalising with wild flowers or spring bulbs.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 As a result of changes to a large number of areas it is possible maintenance budgets may not cover the current frequency as operated, where this occurs it is possible it may result in a reduction of actual maintenance occasions completed by the current Parks workforce. This has a potential for being a decrease in income to the same Parks Operations contractor. It is also possible that subject to the level of changes new machinery maybe required together with additional costs incurred due to the levels of new training requirements to the personnel undertaking the mode of operation.

4. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Where due to the new approach some areas are left for naturalising, reductions in staff may result in such circumstances less seasonal staff could be employed by the Parks Operation.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 Members, Managers and Trade Union Safety Representatives note the contents of this report and receive a follow-up report following the adoption and implementation of the action plan outlined in 2.6 above.

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