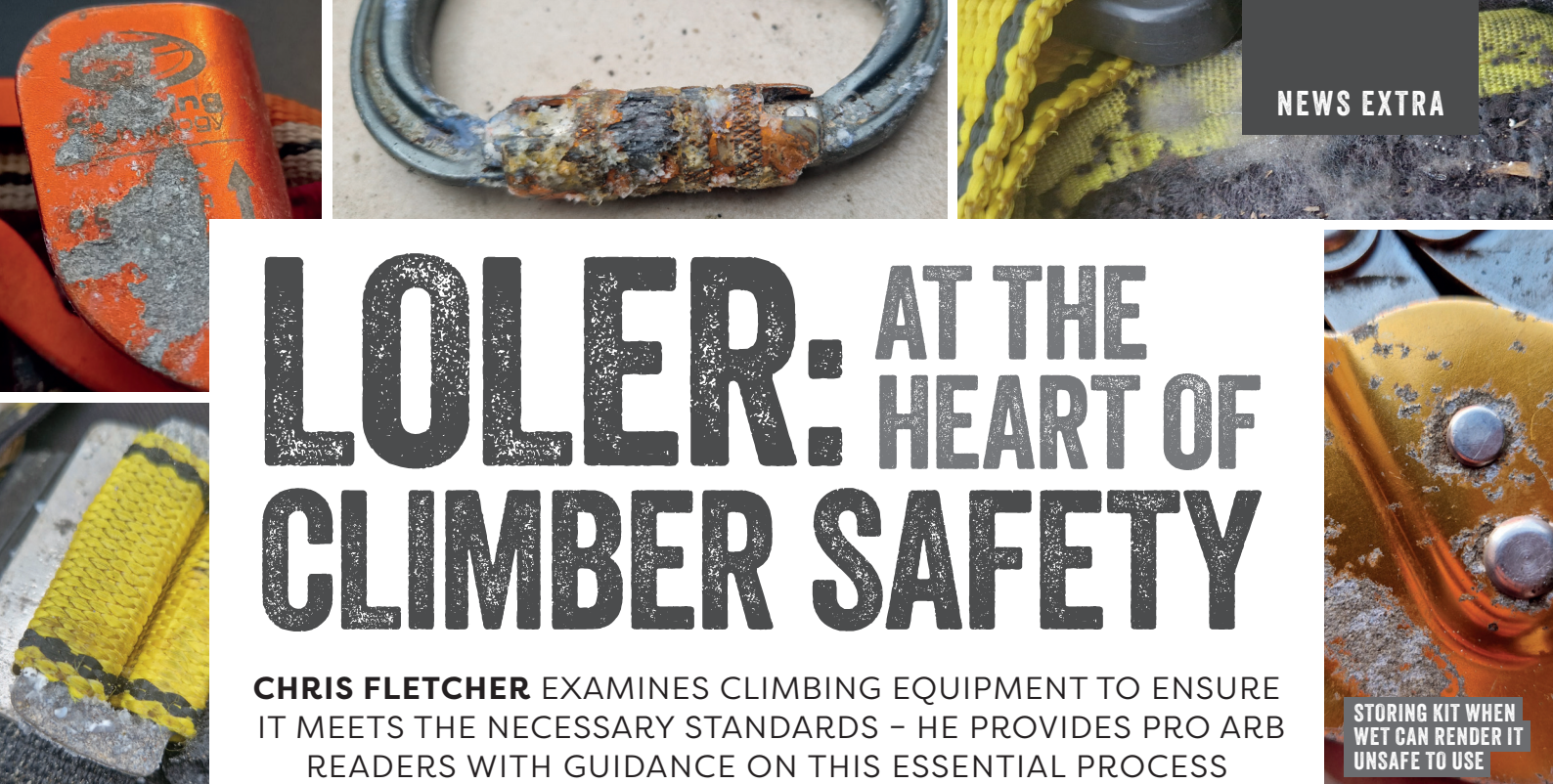




LOLER: AT THE HEART OF CLIMBER SAFETY

CHRIS FLETCHER EXAMINES CLIMBING EQUIPMENT TO ENSURE IT MEETS THE NECESSARY STANDARDS – HE PROVIDES PRO ARB READERS WITH GUIDANCE ON THIS ESSENTIAL PROCESS

STORING KIT WHEN WET CAN RENDER IT UNSAFE TO USE

Chris Fletcher is on a mission to raise awareness of LOLER and to increase knowledge among the arborist community.

He says: “There can be uncertainty and confusion among arborists about what this is and what they need to do. Yet, like an MOT, the legally required ‘thorough examination’ brings many benefits and could even save a life.”

Fletcher, who is based in Lewes, East Sussex, is now largely focused on providing LOLER inspections. He is a former arborist, who still keeps his hand in with occasional climbing and ground work.

He trained at Merrist Wood College, obtaining a distinction in his NCH qualification. He then worked in the UK and also in Germany, before settling in the Brighton area, climbing for a number of firms.

“LOLER has now become my career and I also assist in the training of those looking to become LOLER examiners, as part of the course provided by Scott Fraser Training,” he says.

Fletcher continues: “It makes sense for someone independent to check equipment – those who are dealing with kit every day may fail to pick up when it becomes potentially unsafe – if it is expensive, they may also be reluctant to retire the item.”

Fletcher holds the Thorough Examination of Arboricultural Equipment certificate, and will carry out a systematic and detailed examination of the equipment and safety-critical parts and then produce a written report. This includes:

- The examination date
- The date when the next thorough examination is due
- Any defects found which are (or could potentially become) a danger to people

Where serious defects are identified, the competent person carrying out the examination must immediately report this verbally to the dutyholder, who will typically be the company owner. Where there is a risk of serious accidents, the use of dangerous equipment may lead to the matter being brought to the attention of the HSE.

Fletcher works with many regular clients, offering his services either at his base in Lewes or by travelling to London and the Home Counties. Thorough examinations take place generally every six months for PPE and 12 months for rigging.

What is LOLER?

LOLER stands for the Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations. It is

a set of regulations to ensure all lifting equipment used in workplaces is safe for operation and properly maintained. LOLER was established under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and is enforced by the Health & Safety Executive (HSE). LOLER covers everything that lifts or lowers a load, the exception being spikes.

LOLER is a legal requirement

Climbing can be dangerous, and serious accidents can occur if equipment does not meet required standards. If equipment is safe – and the LOLER regime helps ensure this – risks are significantly reduced. If there is a failure to comply and an accident subsequently occurs, this could lead to prosecution by the HSE, with potential fines or even imprisonment.

Know your kit and check it regularly

Fletcher is responsible for ensuring equipment is compliant with LOLER. However, he says arborists should get into the habit of regularly checking kit, rather than wait for the six-monthly examination.

He points out that new equipment should come with the manufacturer’s instructions on how it should be used, configured, cleaned, maintained and when it should be retired. Even so, he says some spliced ropes, for example, may lack documentation. ▶

LOLER involves 3 core checks**• Pre use checks**

All operators must be able to recognise damage and defects to their equipment which would render it unsafe. Prior to use, the operators are expected to perform any necessary maintenance to equipment (as per manufacturer's instructions).

• Interim inspection (typically weekly)

Further inspections should be carried out between the 'thorough examinations'. The operator should possess sufficient competence to carry this out. For audit purposes, the inspection should be documented and the records should be made. The intervals for this type of inspection may be adjusted according to the type and rate of wear of the equipment and the frequency with which it is used.

• Thorough examination (typically six months PPE and 12 months rigging)

This is carried out by a competent person, and is an objective assessment – they decide if the equipment is fit to be retained in service or removed.

What the examination entails

It is necessary at times to consider the bigger picture as there can be overlapping regulations. However, overall he will consider the condition of the item, what the manufacturer has said in their guidelines regarding the item's lifespan, usage, storage and accepted wear. He will also look at whether the item has been subject to a recall or if there a safety

bulletin released about it, as well as if the item has been configured correctly.

The information from



the examination is recorded to satisfy the LOLER regulations. Fletcher will also provide practical advice to the arborist and comment on condition, lifespans, configuration, compliance as well as maintenance.

TOP TIPS ON KEEPING KIT SAFE

1 DO YOU PERFORM REGULAR MAINTENANCE

Little and often is best – keep instructions and also check out YouTube videos, which may provide additional tips.

2 KEEP YOUR KIT DRY

Waterproof bags are good at keeping water out, but equally as good at keeping water in. Wet stored textiles can easily rot and alloys can oxidize/corrode in the bag.

3 WHEN YOU BUY NEW KIT, PHOTOGRAPH THE TAGS AND SERIAL NUMBERS, along with the invoice, so that you have a record to hand if the information becomes dislodged or lost. A photo on your phone will be date stamped giving you the date the item went into service.

4 AN INSPECTION IS NOT PERSONAL – IT'S LIKE AN MOT

5 BEWARE OF BUYING POTENTIALLY UNTESTED KIT from online retailers such as eBay.



6 CHEAP KIT IS LIKELY TO BE A FALSE ECONOMY There is also fraud – so a karabiner may have CE stamped on it, but not be certified. Always buy from reputable retailers.

7 AVOID SECOND-HAND KIT UNLESS YOU KNOW ITS FULL HISTORY

8 BE SENSIBLE WHEN KIT NEEDS RETIRING – It's probably already paid for itself several times over. If kit fails, remove it from the work environment immediately.

9 IF YOU ARE IN DOUBT ABOUT AN ITEM'S SAFETY, QUARANTINE IT until the LOLER examination

10 LOOK FORWARD TO THE LOLER EXAMINATION It is a chance to develop your knowledge and know your equipment has been independently assessed.

Why kit fails

There can be many reasons, but often the item is in poor condition, damaged or has lost function. It may have exceeded its lifespan – even though this can be a complicated area.

An item should have its own unique ID or serial number, which can be traced back to the manufacturer. For example, if an arborist has made their own prusik or spliced a rope, it will not be compliant – unless it has been officially tested and meets performance criteria. The same applies to incorrect fittings, such as those connected to the bridge or rings on a harness. If any kit fails, Fletcher will bag and tag the items and provide an explanation for the failure.

Safety is paramount, and LOLER offers

professional reassurance. It ensures arborists and their teams use safe kit while also benefiting the business.

Fletcher points out that some commercial contracts ask those tendering for business to say they are LOLER compliant. It is one step in becoming an Arboricultural Association Approved Contractor and may also be required for insurance.

Sub-contractors may find it helps them secure work too – and they might need to show LOLER records to new employers.

*Find out more: You can contact Chris Fletcher on 07990 998550 or email at lolerforarborists@gmail.com
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