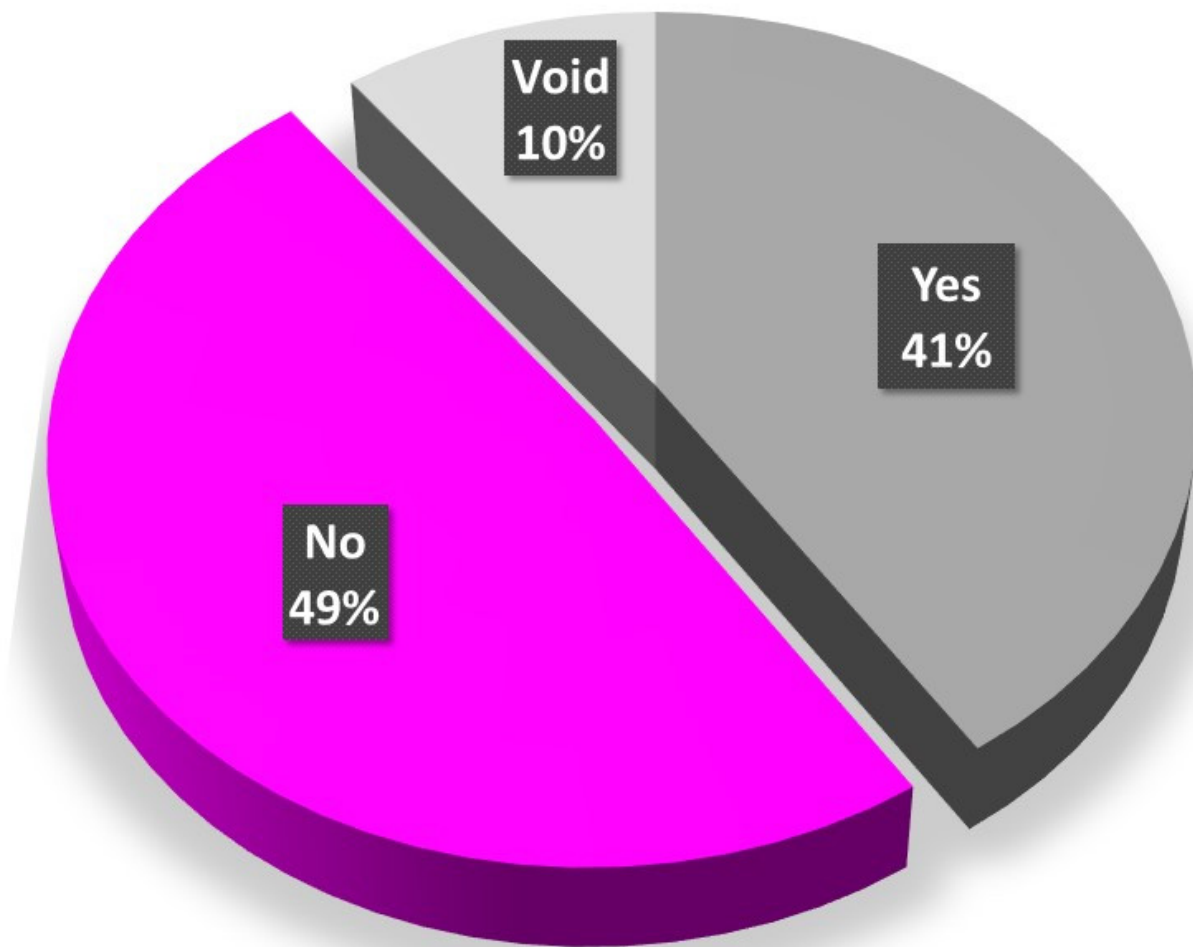


Do you have a formal highway tree strategy?



Opinion...Highway authorities failing on risk

Opinion ...

Highway authorities failing on risk

Research commissioned by the National Tree Safety Group (2009) indicated that tree failures cause about six deaths and 55 serious injuries annually, and more than 75% occur on highways. However, very few of those incidents ever get to court (fewer than 2%). The remaining 98% are usually settled with confidentiality agreements.

In 2012, the death of a motorist in Berkshire after a tree failure resulted in the coroner identifying serious highway tree risk management shortcomings and issuing the first ever Prevention of Future Deaths (PFD) report relating to highway tree inspections. Government-endorsed guidance was subsequently updated and published as *Well-managed Highway Infrastructure* in 2016, advising that highway authorities should develop a policy for tree safety inspections and provide basic training for inspectors.

In my expert witness work, I see cases where highway authorities are either not checking trees at all or carrying out those inspections with poorly trained inspectors, but there is no national record of who is doing what.

Of greater concern is that in some cases I saw trees that were either dead or in such poor condition that a competent inspection should have identified the problem. These observations indicated that people were being injured and killed by tree failures that could have been avoided had all highway authorities complied with the national guidance.

This conclusion was based on my limited personal experience, so in February 2018 I made a Freedom of Information (Fol) request to 214 UK highway authorities seeking clarification.

Although some responses were confused and unclear, my interpretation indicates that on the matter of having a formal highway tree risk management strategy, 10% did not answer, 41% had one, but 49% admitted not having one. Of the 83 authorities I assessed that used highway inspectors to check trees, about 83% confessed to non-compliance with the PFD report.

A significant proportion of UK highway authorities do not have a formal tree risk management strategy and are failing to provide adequate training for highway inspectors checking trees. This is contrary to Government-endorsed guidance and is likely to be contributing to preventable deaths and injuries from tree failure incidents.

That cannot be right, so I plan a follow-up Fol request in early 2019 to see whether a year has made any difference.

