



Tree Risk Assessment – Recognizing & Preventing Hazard Trees

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BULLETIN

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It is the duty of municipalities and property owners to perform risk assessments in order to prevent a hazardous situation such as shown here. Simple pruning will often suffice, and every effort should be made to prevent unnecessary tree removals.

Not long after the new arborist arrived, trees began being felled and a “hit list” of others was presented to the faculty committee that oversaw such matters. Soon, the arborist was known as The Grim Reaper, a title out of character in a profession dedicated to prolonging the lives of trees!

After some investigation, it was learned that the arborist had been to a training session about hazard trees. The course had done such a good job in some respects that the man’s sharpened eye saw potential trouble in nearly every tree. The course had frightened him so badly about potential injuries, property damage and, above all, liability suits, that he viewed tree removal as the only course of action. Old poplars in a park, a pear tree by a dorm and dead snags in the arboretum were viewed the same—and all were scheduled for removal.

Worrying about hazards has resulted in the unnecessary removal of many trees. Although the problem of hazard trees needs to be addressed by every landowner and land manager, removal should be an act of last resort. Instead, some technical knowledge and a lot of common sense are the keys to preventing injuries, property damage and lawsuits due to unsafe trees.

There once was a young arborist who was placed in charge of the trees on a beautiful college campus. Most of the trees under his care had been planted decades before, then carefully nurtured over the years to provide shade and lend grace to the academic setting.

While the arborist’s intentions were good, his method was not. Instead of viewing every tree as a ‘hazard’ if it has a defect, ‘tree risk assessment’ takes into account the potential for failure and the potential for causing harm. Today, forms and decision criteria have been developed to guide the process of assessing risk and the website noted on page 8 provides more information that will help. Basically, the newer method of assessment moves away from labeling a tree a hazard or a safe tree. Instead, it attempts to quantify the risk of harm in a way that allows decision-makers to balance safety with the values that trees provide.

In this issue, some of the signs that warn about dangerous trees are presented, as well as a reminder that those of us who own or manage trees are, indeed, responsible for the safety of people and property in the vicinity of our trees. But you will find no photos of dented cars or smashed houses. Scare tactics may backfire. The better approach is to learn to analyze the setting, consider the risks and benefits, and carefully plan for actions that prevent or correct hazards whenever possible. It is toward that end that this issue is dedicated.



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