

Utility Lines Pose Dangers After Storms

Winter storm season is upon us again, and that spells danger to our urban forest. High winds, ice and snow put tremendous pressures on trees growing near houses or power lines. In their wake, property owners face the task of clearing trees and downed limbs. “Storm cleanup is often when many property owners crank up their first chain saw,” notes Tchukki Andersen, staff arborist for the Tree Care Industry Association. “And, not surprisingly, they injure themselves. It is also the time when ‘ambulance chasing’ tree care operators arrive in town looking for work. Some charge exorbitant amounts for their work.”

TCIA, the trade organization for owners and operators of professional tree care businesses, offers these safety tips to help avoid personal injury or damage to property during storm clean-up, and to assure that you hire an ethical tree service professional. For those homeowners who are thinking of doing the work themselves, here’s a primer on safe tree and brush removal.

If a utility line is down:

- Do not approach. Assume any downed line is energized.
- Call the utility company immediately.
- Don’t touch a tree or anything touching the downed line. Make sure that nobody else, including children and pets, goes near it. Contact with energized lines can result in electrocution.

When deciding whether to try removing a tree yourself:

- Consider the size and location of the tree. If it is more than 20 feet tall or you would have to leave the ground to take it down in pieces, call a professional.
- Even small trees bent under tension can be extremely hazardous.
- Carefully inspect the tree and the surrounding area for anything – utility lines, structures, vehicles, shrubs – that might get hit or interfere with the tree felling or removal.
- Examine the shape and lean of the tree. Inspect the trunk for decay, weak spots or hanging limbs, and for any metal or concrete in or around the tree. If so, the tree is unstable and extra precautions are needed while removing that tree.
- Note the location of other people in the area. Children should not be left to wander anywhere near the drop zone.
- Plan an escape route from the falling tree before cutting.
- Do not use a chain saw for tree removal unless you have years of experience handling one. Even professional tree care personnel face risk of injury using chain saws. Tree removals are very unpredictable. Don’t take unnecessary chances!

Hire an insured, tree care professional:

The best advice is to hire a tree care professional with the experience, expertise and equipment to safely take down or prune damaged trees. Require proof of liability insurance, and check to see if the cost of the work is covered by your insurance company. Contact the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA), a 70-year-old public and professional resource on trees and arboriculture. It has more than 2,000 member companies who recognize stringent safety and performance standards and who are required to carry liability insurance. TCIA also has the nation’s only Accreditation program that helps consumers find tree care companies that have been inspected and accredited based on: adherence to industry standards for quality and safety; maintenance of trained, professional staff; and dedication to ethics and quality in business practices.

An easy way to find a tree care service provider in your area is to use the “Locate Your Local TCIA Member Companies” program. You can use this service by calling 1-800-733-2622 or by doing a ZIP code search at www.treecaretips.org.

Editors: If you would like additional information or digital photos, please contact editor@tcia.org.