

Utility Lines Pose Dangers After Storms

Winter storms 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 Robert Rouse, staff arborist for the National Arborist 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.”

The National Arborist Association, the trade organization for owners and operators of 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 do attempt this work—which is not recommended—here’s a primer on safe tree and brush removal.

If a utility line is down:

- Call the utility company immediately.
- Assume any downed line is energized.
- 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 removing a tree:

- Note the location of other people in the area and plan an escape route from the falling tree before cutting.
- Carefully inspect the tree and the surrounding area for anything—utility lines, property, vehicles, etc.—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, take extra precaution while removing that tree.
- Even small trees bent under tension can be extremely hazardous.

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 a 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. For a list of professional arborists in your area, contact the National Arborist Association, 1-800-733-2622 or by a zip code search on the NAA’s Web site: www.natlarb.com. The NAA is a 63-year-old public and professional resource on trees and arboriculture. Its more than 2,800 members all recognize stringent safety and performance standards, and are required to carry liability insurance.