

Tree Removal Standards

The current Connecticut roadside forest has many large trees, many neglected trees, and many trees that pose a serious risk to people and property. A stepped-up effort towards removal of trees that are a significant risk because of structural defects or being in poor health with numerous dead limbs, for example, is essential for the safety and well-being of the people of the state. For this to be acceptable to the public, there must be a generally agreed-upon understanding of the benefits and values of trees as well as their inherent risks. The standards for determining when a tree should be removed must be guided by the insights and knowledge of qualified professionals, including certified tree wardens and licensed arborists, and implemented by municipalities, private property owners, the State of Connecticut and the public utilities in a manner that also includes a commitment to the stewardship of our roadside forest.

The approach we advocate towards encouraging this increased level of tree removal has two components. First, it is important that field crews and field decision makers be given clear, concise and specific guidance as to the causes and conditions that would lead to a decision to remove a tree. Second, it is important that an educational network regarding trees and tree removals be fostered, so that, as a group, we learn, get better, and adapt as our knowledge improves.

In the middle of this balance between guidance and learning is a commitment to tree removal training for municipal, private arborist, utility tree crews, and others.

The Basic Elements of a Tree Removal Training Program

Training programs with regards to tree removals should start, first and foremost, with safety. Tree work in any manner is inherently dangerous. Safety is essential.

Experts in tree care should be called on to provide clear guidance on the types of situations and circumstances in which a tree ought to be removed. These can range from trees that are determined to be structurally compromised to trees that are unsafe due to their location with regards to the road.

Training should also focus on the basic physiology and structure of trees, how tree conditions can negatively impact the structural condition of a tree, and how trees respond to stress and adverse conditions such as recent construction. The seven categories of tree defects as outlined by the USDA Forest Service should be a key component of this training:

1. Decayed Wood
2. Cracks
3. Root Problems

4. Weak Branch Unions
5. Cankers
6. Poor Tree Architecture
7. Dead Trees, Tops or Branches

Training should emphasize proper techniques and alternative methods of tree removal. All companies involved in tree removals, including, especially, municipal and utility crews, should be encouraged to take this training. The general outline for this training should be developed by the tree care professional groups as a whole, and supported by efforts at the state level.

Standardized Approach to Tree Removals

Training:

One of the non-profit organizations in Connecticut (e.g. CUFC, CTPA, or TWAC) takes the lead in authorizing the development of a standardized training program for tree removals, with the emphasis on tree removals within the roadside forest. This training program would include:

- safety
- an overview of form and function within the healthy tree
- the seven structural defect categories from the US Forest Service (*Urban Tree Risk Management, 2003*)
- tree growth response, including to structural defects
- the role of environment
- tree assessment, including both tools and methods
- the importance of identifying targets
- an overview of various methods of tree removal along with directions as to where to go to get additional training
- guidance on how to best reuse or otherwise capture the value of the wood produced by removals

As part of this training program, a decision key will be developed to help guide tree removal decisions. This tree removal key may be based on one of the existing hazard tree rating sheets.

The “Tree Risk Management” program developed by Bartlett Tree Experts and used by CT DOT for training may be used as a guide for how to set up this program. A grant may be sought to allow this training program to be created. Once created, it will be shared and presented widely throughout the state.

Municipal Planning:

It must be recognized that a proportionally high number of trees need to be removed along our state roads and highways, due to the age, size, condition and deferred maintenance of these trees.

To help tackle this backlog, each municipality will be encouraged to develop a plan for the prioritized removal of trees from the roadside forest. Priorities for tree removal will be based upon:

- the condition of the tree
- the importance of a road section, especially during emergencies (e.g., main roads leading to a hospital)
- areas where the risk to targets should a tree fail are greatest (e.g., busy intersections)

Each town will take these three parameters into consideration as they assess trees for removal, and remove those with the highest priority rating first.

Tree wardens will recognize that the authority of the tree warden includes all trees that extend into or overhang the public right of way, and so will assess those trees whose base is outside of the right-of-way in a manner similar to town-owned trees, and with the same authority to call for their removal.

As a first step in developing the plan, each municipality should at a minimum conduct a windshield survey to identify and record those trees that present the greatest risk, according to the three categories mentioned above.

The State DEEP is encouraged to assist the towns in developing their plans for tree removal by developing a model tree removal plan. The State might also develop a system by which tree removals and tree inventory data are compiled in a comprehensive database that is based on standardized input from communities around the state.