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Out on a Limb: Tree Care Tips for the Tampa Bay Region

Quote “Someone's sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago.” — Warren Buffett

Tree Trimming and Electric Power Lines – Questions and Answers

Is it true that electric utilities are required by federal law to cut down trees near their power lines?

No. In order to prevent power outages, federally approved reliability standards require utilities to manage vegetation growth along the path of their larger power transmission lines to prevent trees or other vegetation from contacting the power lines. However, federally approved reliability standards do not mandate or prohibit clear-cutting or any other particular method of vegetation management, nor do they apply to the smaller distribution lines that deliver power directly to your home.

Who decides whether an electric utility can cut down a tree near a power line?

The choice of how to trim trees and manage vegetation growth near a power line is primarily made by the local electric utility, subject to state and local requirements and laws, applicable safety codes, and any limitations or obligations specified in rights-of-way agreements.

The power lines near my house don't seem to be anywhere near the trees, so why is the electric utility trimming my trees anyway?

There are two reasons for this. First, electric utilities are required to maintain the appropriate clearance between trees and transmission lines at all times. For example, in the summer, power lines sag as they expand, due to higher air temperatures and heavy use. Clearances around the lines must account for this, as well as wind, which causes the lines to sway. So on a cool, still day, it may appear that there is ample, or even excessive, clearance that is needed for hot or windy day. Second, electric utilities usually prune or remove vegetation to a distance greater than the minimum clearances to account for future growth.

Is tree trimming around utility lines really necessary?

Yes.

Tree trimming and vegetation management are part of a system to provide safe and reliable electric service. Trees in contact with electrical conductors are often problematic and dangerous. Electrical outages, momentary interruptions, electrically induced fires, personal property damage, and even personal injury are potential outcomes. Trees are among the leading causes of power outages.

Is the utility company required to adhere to state codes and professional standards?

Yes.

Florida's utility companies must adhere to the Florida Administrative Code, Chapter 366, Public Utilities Statute 366.04, National Electric Safety Code (NESC) Section 21, Part 2, Rule 218 and the American National Standards Institute pruning standards (ANSI) A300, Part 1, Part 7 and Z-133, as well as the special companion publication, *Best Management Practices – Utility Pruning of Trees*.

Florida's utility companies use qualified professional tree trimming contractors that follow [ANSI A – 300 tree care industry standards](#) and [OSHA \(Line Clearance Trimming Operations\) safety guidelines](#) to manage the trees and vegetation around electrical lines and facilities.

Finally, keep in mind that it is not the utility company's primary intent to trim the whole tree or to trim for aesthetic purposes. Trees are pruned to direct their growth away from the power lines.

Controversy can arise when property owners believe that their trees were pruned inappropriately or too severely. Though sometimes mistakes are made, the contractor performing the work is typically following specifications as directed by the utility.



Trees and Powerlines, University Florida website

<https://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/treesandpowerlines/index.shtml>

and

Pruning Near Utility Lines, University of Florida website

<https://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/woody/utility-pruning.shtml>

Did you know?

Please send in your questions and I will answer them via email or in upcoming issues of this newsletter.

Send your favorite tree picture and I will try to use it in the newsletter.

The webinar:

‘Designing Urban Rights-of-Way to Prevent Damage from Tree Roots’

was recorded and can be viewed at:

<https://youtu.be/mBMcirnGJEA>

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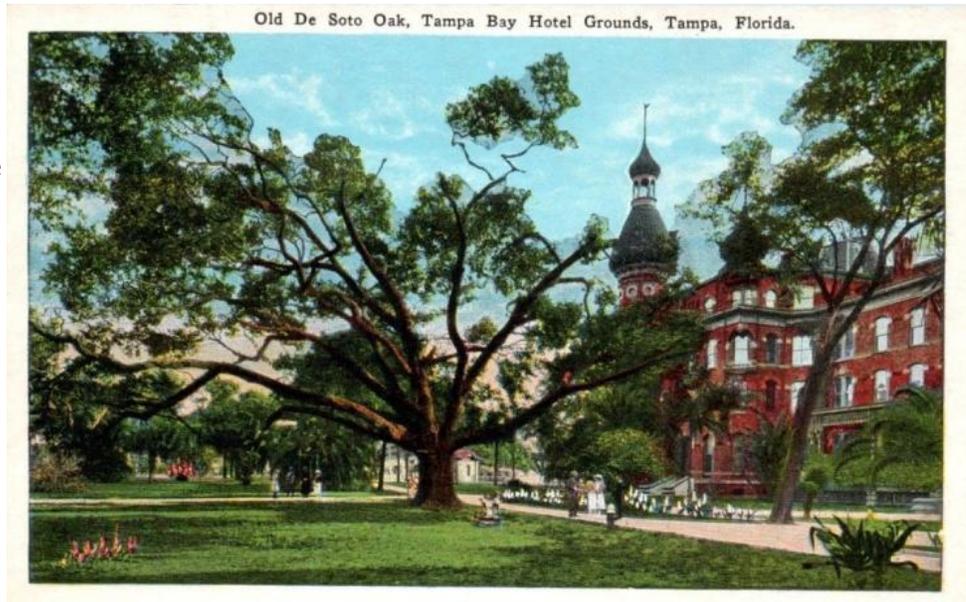
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De Soto Oak (early 1900's) – now on the campus of the University of Tampa