



established 1938

# National Arborist Association

*Dedicated to the Advancement of Commercial Tree Care Businesses*

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*For immediate release*

## Who Ruined My Tree?

Every day across the country, homeowners return home from work to find that the beautiful shade trees by the street in front of their houses have been drastically pruned. Instead of a thick, symmetrical canopy of leaves, there is a gaping, V-shaped hole through the middle of the tree that reveals the overhead electrical conductors.

Consumers may not be aware that while trees add significantly to the beauty of our communities, they are also responsible for costly property damage as well as dangerous power outages. In fact, tree failure is by far the leading cause of electrical outages nationwide. The tree that grows into electrical conductors presents a potential hazard to property owners and others in the community if it becomes energized or wipes out a power line. This is why we see utility line clearance contractors trimming trees in our neighborhoods.

Some residents get irritated and feel that these trees are needlessly damaged. "The National Arborist Association [NAA] receives a lot of calls from homeowners complaining that their utility company 'drastically' cut trees near power lines," says Peter Gerstenberger, director of safety and education for the NAA. "While it is vitally necessary for utilities to trim trees, sometimes severely, it is nevertheless important for them to follow tree care standards of practice."

When one is evaluating the quality of line clearance tree trimming, it's important to consider that the utility's primary objective is to prevent outages as well as electrical hazards. Minimally, the tree should be left in a healthy state, with at least some aesthetic value. If this cannot be accomplished, the utility may opt to remove the tree rather than create an eyesore and future problem.

### Why the gaping hole in the canopy?

The utility company specifies a certain amount of clearance around its wires, depending upon the voltage, the tree's growth rate and other characteristics, and the pruning cycle (how frequently it will be pruned). Furthermore, scientific research has proven that it is better from the standpoint of tree health if the trimming crew removes whole limbs with a relatively small number of large cuts versus making numerous small cuts and leaving stubbed off branches. Finally, utilities have found that removal of entire limbs helps to train the future growth of the tree away from the wires, keeping maintenance costs to a minimum while helping to insure that the tree needn't receive the same drastic pruning in the future.

Trees that will inevitably grow into power lines should not be planted under or near utility lines. Smaller, ornamental trees work best near power lines. Larger trees should be planted far enough away from lines that they will not need drastic pruning ten, 20 or 30 years later.

The NAA is the Secretariat for the ANSI A300 Standard, a national standard that governs tree pruning operations, including line clearance. An easy way to find a tree care service provider in your area is to use the National Arborist Association's "Locate Your Local NAA Member Companies" program. You can use this service by calling the NAA at 1-800-733-2622 or by doing a zip code search on their Web site, [www.natlarb.com](http://www.natlarb.com). When you hire an NAA-member tree care company, you are assured that the company you are hiring has access to the most recent information on tree care practices, and you know that the company you are hiring is insured and/or bonded to protect you and your valuable property.

***If you would like digital photos and/or diagrams of proper and improper line clearance tree trimming, please contact [Garvin@natlarb.com](mailto:Garvin@natlarb.com)***