

News Article

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Storms and Trees – Now What?

Recent storms have left many homeowners with downed limbs and landscape trees that have new injury or exposed defects. What do you do now?

Lindsey Purcell, Purdue Urban Forestry Specialist, has written about these issues.

Homeowners should consider safety first. “Stay clear and look for dangerous hanging limbs, broken branches and other failures before beginning cleanup or inspections,” said Purcell. “Keep others clear of the areas beneath and around damaged trees.” Purcell said to be alert for power lines that could be involved with damaged trees. All utility lines should be considered energized and dangerous.

Purcell said, “In my experience, during storm cleanup, many tree owners are faced with the decision of what to do with their trees relative to restoration or removal.”

Purcell urged homeowners to inspect their trees regularly. “It is important to understand that tree owners have a duty to inspect and maintain their trees,” said Purcell. “All property owners should take reasonable steps to protect themselves by involving a qualified consultant or certified arborist when needed.”

There are several types of tree damage that occur from violent weather, and each has its own specific assessment considerations. After major weather events, the assessment services of an International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) Certified Arborist may be warranted, especially when issues of potential liability exist.

“Every inspection should be recorded and kept on file for future reference,” said Purcell. “Past evaluations can show how a tree has changed in its health and structure over the years.” Also, these written evaluations could minimize liability if a failure occurs and a claim is filed against the tree owner, Purcell said.

The evaluation or assessment process involves a risk vs. benefit analysis. In other words, what are the potential risks associated with the tree in comparison to the benefits the tree provides?

“For a tree to be considered a risk it must be defective and a target that is threatened,” said Purcell. He said that targets include people, property or activities that could be injured, damaged or disrupted by a tree failure. “Review everything in the target zone,” he said. “This should include the area inside a circle around the tree, which is at least as wide as the total tree height.”

“Read the body language of the tree,” he said. “Inspect each section of the tree including the crown, branches and root zone to check for signs of failure.”

Find Purcell’s original articles at Purdue Landscape Report, <https://www.purduelandscapereport.org/> and <https://extension.purdue.edu/article/34637>. Additionally, view the publication “Trees and Storms” located in The Education Store, Purdue Extension’s resource center, at www.edustore.purdue.edu. ISA Certified Arborists may be found online at <http://www.isa-arbor.com/findanarborist/arboristsearch.aspx>.