



TREE WARDEN
HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT
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December 1, 2011

Re: Report of the Tree Warden following the Recent Storm

To Whom It May Concern:

Since the Halloween snow storm that brought down unprecedented numbers of trees and limbs which in turn brought down power lines everywhere, I have had some queries about the tree pruning practices by the Highway Department and the Hudson Light and Power Department. This memo is being written in response to those queries.

The Superintendent of Streets, the Assistant Superintendent of Streets, and I all keep an eye out in our daily travels for dead, dying, and storm-damaged trees and limbs that could pose hazards to the public. We also get reports about potentially hazardous trees and limbs from other Highway Department employees, police officers, and members of the general public. We keep a list of those trees needing work, and as time allows the Highway Department tree crews prune and/or remove trees that are on the list, as well as others that are found in the areas where the crews are working. The list is several pages long, and as trees are removed from the list others are added, so the list always seems to stay several pages long.

The trees on the list that are too close to the power lines for the Highway employees to handle safely are referred to the HL&P line clearing crews for their attention. Whenever possible, the Highway Department tree crew works with the HL&P line clearing crew to take care of those trees that are deemed potentially hazardous to the power lines.

Following the Halloween storm, I drove around with the above-mentioned list, and found that almost none of the trees on that list had succumbed to the storm. It was not a surprise to me, for several reasons. First of all, most of the trees on our list that are deemed potentially hazardous to power lines have already been taken care of. Secondly, most of the trees that are taken down by ice and snow and/or high winds are live healthy trees that have a lot of foliage to catch ice and snow. That same foliage also acts as a sail to catch the wind, which in some cases is more than the root system or some large limbs can handle. Dead and dying trees have less foliage and therefore are less likely to come down under these conditions.

Although the Public Shade Tree law makes it illegal for anyone to cut or prune a town-owned tree along our public ways, the need for pruning by the power companies is recognized as a vital necessity for the public good. Therefore, an exception is made for them, and they have the tree warden's permission to prune within reason in accordance with their policy to try to have a clear "window" around their wires of approximately 5 feet by 10 feet. This is not always possible, but in many cases where cutting that far from the wires would dramatically alter a tree, the tree warden is consulted by HL&P, and the interest of the power company (and therefore the interests of its customers) is weighed against the value of the shade tree. We don't always agree on the solution, but we try to work together towards a happy medium.

It should be noted that most of the trees that came down during the Halloween storm, blocking roads and taking down wires, came from the private properties that abut our roads, and were not actually our street trees. Most of us live in wooded environments with mature trees that are 50, 60, or even 70 feet tall. A 60-foot tree that stands in someone's front yard 30 feet off the side of the road can easily block an entire 24-foot wide road and take down the power lines on the opposite side of the road when it falls! No one is to blame when something like that happens. No one could prepare for that circumstance without clear-cutting all our streets and front yards. So we just deal with it like the hardy New Englanders that we are, and relish all the free firewood and the opportunity to tell stories for years to come.

Municipally yours,

Bruce E. Fletcher
Tree Warden