

Tree Pruning and Power Line Safety

Keeping trees away from power lines is important. A power outage may happen when tree limbs come in contact with power lines. Energized tree limbs are also a safety hazard to anyone who touches the tree.

Reasons that Utilities Prune Trees

SAFETY: To reduce the risk of electric shock and fire hazard by providing separation between wires and trees.

RELIABILITY: To reduce utility service interruptions. Trees that are too close to power lines can interfere with electric service, especially during harsh weather.

Pruning Professionals

Qualified utility line clearance professionals should work on a tree that has branches near power lines. Qualified utility line clearance professionals should trim trees near active power lines using pruning techniques that meet national safety and best practices standards.

Homeowners should not hire a private tree contractor to work on trees near power lines or attempt to do the work themselves. The utility should first be contacted before trees are worked on near power lines.

Planting Trees

When planting a new tree, consider the placement of the tree and what space the tree will need when it reaches its mature height and width.

Look up from the proposed planting site and ensure there are no overhead wires in the vicinity. If there are, consult your utility before planting.

Be aware of the location of any underground utilities. When projects involve digging, contact SC811 at (803) 939-1117 at least three working days in advance to request SC811 mark the location. State law requires notification before any excavation project.

When Trees are Pruned

The time between tree-trimming activities varies from utility to utility, and most utilities try to prune trees BEFORE they pose a risk to power lines.

Service interruptions may happen even if tree limbs do not come in contact with power lines. Utilities trim trees to prevent outages due to limbs swaying in the wind, sagging from the weight of ice/snow, or trees uprooting.



Pruning Factors

The type of pruning performed by a utility depends on a number of factors:

- tree growth rate and structure
- wind direction and water sources
- tree species and health
- proximity of tree to wires and line configuration— higher voltage lines require greater clearance

Directional Pruning

One pruning technique is called directional pruning. Directional pruning removes branches growing toward the power lines while leaving those that are growing away.

Although the ORS does not have jurisdiction over tree-trimming or vegetation management, ORS Consumer Services can help with other utility-related issues. If you've spoken with your utility and still need help, ORS Consumer Services can contact the company on your behalf. The ORS can check to see whether the utility has followed all applicable regulations. Staff can also direct you to social services agencies that may have available funds to assist with your utility bills.

About the Office of Regulatory Staff

The ORS represents consumers of investor-owned utilities in South Carolina before the PSC. The PSC is the state agency that sets utilities' rates. The ORS must look at the impact to the consumer and utilities' continued investment in reliable and high-quality services.



Trees growing directly under power lines may appear U or V-shaped.



Trees growing alongside power lines may appear L-shaped, or one side may be completely removed.



Trees may appear misshapen, but the priority of pruning is to improve safety and service reliability; the appearance of the tree is not the ultimate goal.

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