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DEALING WITH TREE DAMAGE AFTER JULY 28 STORM

It's a well known fact that trees are valuable landscape assets, providing cooling shade in the summer and improving our air quality, while increasing the value of homes. However, as was evident during the July 28th microburst in Freehold, trees can also be a liability and hazard if not maintained properly. JCP&L stated that most of the trees that fell during that storm, causing prolonged electric outages and severe property damage, were dead or dying trees. As the area rebounds from this disaster, you and your clients will benefit from knowing how to choose a tree care professional as well as how to recognize hazardous situations in trees.

If your clients request that you clean up a storm damaged tree, whether removing broken limbs or an entire tree, and you are not a qualified tree care professional, it is best that one be consulted, especially if the removal will require climbing or cutting limbs from up high in the tree. Additionally, while trees may not always display obvious signs of stress or even decline, if there is a large tree by a house or near electric lines, encourage your clients to have it examined by a certified tree care professional to evaluate whether it may be a safety hazard in future storms.

While anyone can call themselves a 'tree expert' or 'arborist', you and the homeowner should be aware that just because someone has a chainsaw, this does not necessarily make them qualified to safely remove trees from properties. Anyone showing up unsolicited after the July storm looking to remove

trees, even if it's at a great deal, should be asked for proof of insurance coverage, including personal liability, property liability, and workmen's compensation, and should also be asked for references of clients who have had similar work done.

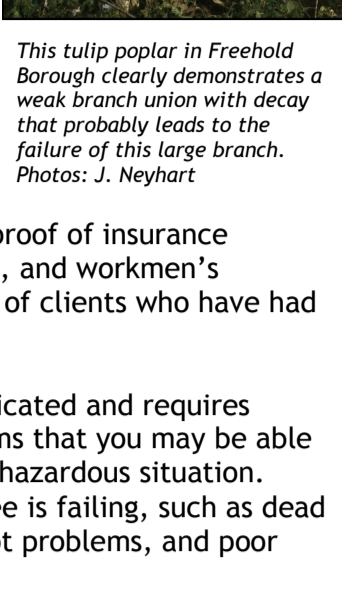
Although evaluating and treating hazard trees is complicated and requires knowledge and expertise, there are some basic problems that you may be able to preliminarily identify that will alert your client to a hazardous situation. Hazardous defects in trees are visible signs that the tree is failing, such as dead wood, cracks, weak branch unions, decay, cankers, root problems, and poor tree architecture.

Dead wood is "not negotiable"—dead trees and large dead branches must be removed immediately! A crack is a deep split through the bark, extending into the wood of the tree. Cracks are extremely dangerous because they indicate that the tree is already failing. Weak branch unions are places where branches are not strongly attached to the tree. Decaying trees have wood that is soft or crumbly, or a cavity where the wood is missing, creating a serious hazard. A canker is a localized area on the stem or branch of a tree, usually caused by disease or wounds, where the bark is sunken or missing. Trees with root problems may blow over in wind storms. They may even fall without warning in summer when burdened with the weight of the tree's leaves. Because most defective roots are underground and out of sight, aboveground symptoms may serve as the best warning. Finally, poor architecture is a growth pattern that indicates weakness or structural imbalance. Trees with strange shapes are interesting to look at, but may be structurally defective.

Never hesitate if you think a tree might be hazardous, have it evaluated by a tree care professional. A NJ Certified Tree Expert is a tree care professional that has been certified by the Board of Tree Experts of the NJDEP. Another recognized tree care certification is administered by the International Society of Arboriculture. Homeowners may ask if the company they hire has staff with one or both of these certifications to help ensure safe, professional, quality work. For a list of Certified Tree Experts in Monmouth County, go to www.state.nj.us/dep/parksandforests/forest/community/cte.html. For a local listing of ISA Certified Arborists, go to www.isa-arbor.com. For more information on how to hire a tree care professional, go to the fact sheet at the Rutgers Cooperative Extension publications website <http://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.asp?pid=FS019>.



A large established maple tree showing the destructive power of the July 28 2012 storm.



This tulip poplar in Freehold Borough clearly demonstrates a weak branch union with decay that probably leads to the failure of this large branch. Photos: J. Neyhart

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