

Taking Steps to Reduce Risk From Trees

By Deb Nelson, Stoughton Tree Commission

Taking necessary steps to reduce risk of living around trees is as important as looking both ways before crossing the street. If a hazardous situation exists in a tree, there are three recommended options for correcting the problem: **move the target, prune the tree, or remove the tree.**

Moving the Target: removing the target is often an inexpensive and effective treatment for correcting a hazard tree. Easily moved items like play sets and swings, RV's and picnic tables can be placed out of the reach of the hazardous tree with little effort and expense. If the target cannot be moved and a serious hazard exists, consider blocking access to the target area until the hazard can be properly eliminated.

Pruning the Tree: a hazardous situation may be caused by a defective branch or branches even though the rest of the tree is sound. In this case, pruning the branch solves the problem. Pruning should be done when a branch is dead, a branch is cracked or decayed, a weak branch union exists, when a branch forms a sharp angle, twist or bend, when a branch is lopsided or unbalanced with respect to the rest of the tree, or if a broken branch is lodged in the canopy.

When deciding whether to prune it is important to remember the one-third rules. Do not prune out more than one third of the canopy within a growing season. Do not prune out any branches larger than one-third the size of the branch it is connected to. And do not top trees. Any one of these pruning practices most often results in the decline of the trees.

Removing the Tree: tree removal should be considered as the final option and used only when the other two corrective actions will not work. Unfortunately, many situations that involve people, trees, and economic budgets do not allow for other alternatives for corrective actions. Really, the best alternative is to involve people and trees and economic budgets in preventative actions. This way, corrective actions and decisions to remove trees rarely need to be made.