



# TRIDENT

PUBLIC RISK SOLUTIONS  
MEMBER OF PARADIGM INSURANCE HOLDINGS, LLC

# RISK CONTROL BEST PRACTICES: Trees and Roadside Vegetation

This guide presents best practices for managing exposures stemming from trees and roadside vegetation.

## Establish a Tree Risk Assessment Program

Trees present a number of problems for public works departments, including expensive and hazardous pruning and removal, insect damage, and root-caused damage to sidewalks and utility infrastructure.

- The best way to limit exposure to tree-related liability is to create a program to assess the risk.
- Be aware of state laws and statutory protections regarding ownership of trees and responsibility for damages.

## Track Preventive Maintenance and Customer Concerns

Ensure that tree evaluations and actions taken to remedy issues are documented in a timely fashion.

- Although your response to complaints may be affected by the risk to public safety, ongoing weather or other emergencies, keeping consistent records of your efforts is critical.
- Implement a procedure and work order system for tracking tree-related complaints.
- The system should include the date/time/name of person reporting, address of tree or vegetation, and the date/time/type of action taken.
- Track all notifications, consistently using the tracking tool at the end of this document or a similar one.

## Implement a Formal Tree Maintenance Plan

Be proactive. Merely responding to complaints will not reduce risk exposure sufficiently.

- Conduct a tree risk assessment for all trees in the jurisdiction.
- First, assess trees on high-traffic roads and near public buildings or parks. Grade each tree and create a priority list based on tree conditions.
- Prioritize work on trees that need to be pruned or removed.
- Create a watch list for trees and set an inspection schedule to monitor trees on the list.



## Confirm Tree Ownership to Keep Maintenance on Track

When the ownership of a tree is ambiguous, the risk of costly claims increases because maintenance is ignored.

- Create a list of trees whose ownership is unclear.
- Work with owners of adjacent land to come up with a plan for each tree.
- Consult attorneys, if needed, and document the process.
- Depending on the condition of the tree(s) and the risk of damage, consider working with the adjacent landowner(s) to prune the tree(s). Be sure to obtain a signed waiver that limits your liability in the event of future damage.

## Inspect Roads for Overgrown Vegetation and Hanging Tree Limbs

Look for obscured traffic signs or obstructed views at intersections.

- Conduct visual road inspections throughout the year – particularly in the summer months – to ensure that roadside vegetation and hanging tree limbs are trimmed.
- Pay attention to trees that may not be on your watch list but could present an exposure worth monitoring.
- Monitor roadside vegetation closely: The rate of growth can change from year to year, so an area may require more (or less) frequent mowing and trimming.

## Seek to Transfer Risk Properly

When possible, hire contractors and transfer the risk.

- Choose contractors who are certified and insured to do the work.
- Ensure that contractors have the proper equipment and trained, certified staff.

## Resource Links

- The International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) Basic Tree Risk Assessment Form (fillable):  
[www.isa-arbor.com/Portals/0/Assets/PDF/Certification-Applications/ISA-Basic-Tree-Risk-Form-fillable.pdf](http://www.isa-arbor.com/Portals/0/Assets/PDF/Certification-Applications/ISA-Basic-Tree-Risk-Form-fillable.pdf)
- ISA Basic Tree Risk Assessment Form Instructions:  
[www.isa-arbor.com/Portals/0/Assets/PDF/Certification-Applications/ISA-Basic-Tree-Risk-Assessment-Form-Instructions.pdf](http://www.isa-arbor.com/Portals/0/Assets/PDF/Certification-Applications/ISA-Basic-Tree-Risk-Assessment-Form-Instructions.pdf)



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