

Nebraska Forest Service Storm Damage Bulletin No. 2

HOW TO SELECT AN ARBORIST OR TREE SERVICE

As clean up from any storm swings into high gear, many Nebraska communities begin to deal with the problem of removing and repairing severely damaged surviving trees. In most cases, this kind of work should be done by professional arborists. This bulletin deals with how to hire professional tree-care help.

Hiring an arborist deserves careful consideration. A qualified arborist will do tree work properly and safely, but an unqualified person may further damage the tree, and more importantly may not be insured, leaving the liability burden to the client. This liability could run into the tens of thousands of dollars.

Remember the following points when hiring or contracting with an arborist:

- ❖ Check your telephone directory's yellow pages under "Tree Service" for a listing of those businesses that do tree work in your area. While anyone can be listed in the phone book, a listing at least indicates some degree of permanence. Be cautious of any arborist that advertises "topping" as a service. **"Topping" is not an approved tree maintenance practice.**
- ❖ Ask for certification by either the Nebraska Arborists Association or the International Society of Arboriculture. Certification is not required by the State of Nebraska but it does indicate that the arborist has a high degree of knowledge.
- ❖ If the arborist you are considering is not certified, determine if he/she is a member of any professional organizations, such as the Nebraska Arborists Association, the International Society of Arboriculture or the National Arborists Association. Membership in these and other professional organizations does not guarantee quality, but does indicate professional commitment.
- ❖ Ask for certificates of insurance, including proof of liability for personal and property damage and worker's compensation. Then, contact the insurance company to make sure the policy is current. Under some circumstances, you can be held financially responsible if an uninsured worker is hurt on your property or if the worker damages a neighbor's property.
- ❖ Ask for local references. Take a look at some of the work, and if possible, talk with former clients. Experience, education and a good reputation are signs of a good arborist.
- ❖ Don't rush into a decision just because you are promised a discount if you sign an agreement now. Be sure you understand what work is to be done for what amount of money. It is not generally a good idea to pay in full until the work is completed.
- ❖ Most reputable tree care companies have all the work they can handle without going door to door. People who aren't competent arborists may solicit tree work after storms, seeing an opportunity to earn quick money.

Storm damage creates high-risk situations for both workers and property. Legitimate arborists **never** ask for payment in advance.

- ❖ If possible, get more than one estimate.
- ❖ A conscientious arborist will not use climbing spikes except when removing a tree. Climbing spikes open unnecessary wounds that could lead to decay.
- ❖ Good tree work is not inexpensive. A good arborist must carry several kinds of insurance as well as pay for expensive and specialized equipment. Beware of estimates that fall well below the average. There may be hidden costs or the arborist may not be fully insured or trained.