



Spring clean-up can create danger around power lines

Property owners should take steps to be safe

Bonneville Power Administration

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PORTLAND, Ore. — Spring is here, marked by the roar of chain saws as people clear away winter debris. While the big clean-up begins, the Bonneville Power Administration is asking Northwest residents to help keep trees and other potential hazards away from power lines.

“As Northwest cities grow, more housing and recreational activities are spreading into what were once rural areas where high-voltage power lines are located,” said BPA danger tree specialist Kirk Tousley. “This situation, along with tumultuous weather conditions, can create a dangerous mix of people and electricity.”

BPA owns and operates more than 15,000 miles of high voltage power lines in the Northwest. Many of these lines pass through rural neighborhoods, including private property. Local public utilities own and operate lower voltage distribution lines that run along streets and deliver power directly to homes and businesses. When people improve their property with trees, fences or other structures, BPA advises them to keep in mind the power lines nearby.

Trees need not touch power lines to be dangerous. During hot weather or when carrying heavy amounts of electricity, power lines can sag bringing them dangerously close to trees. Electricity can “arc” or jump from power lines to nearby trees, sparking wildfires or injuring people nearby. Safely growing and pruning trees and shrubs can make the difference between creating beautiful landscapes or safety hazards. Only trained experts should remove trees that are close to transmission lines.

Anyone planning to remove debris or plant or build anything that could potentially interfere with BPA power lines or facilities should contact BPA first. BPA danger tree specialists can help prevent problems before they start. Homeowners can also prevent potential problems by following a few simple guidelines when planting trees on property near power lines:

- apply for a free BPA tree and brush permit when trees are planted on a BPA right-of-way,
- limit trees and shrubs on the right-of-way to no more than 10 feet in height,
- don't plant within 30 feet of towers, poles or other electrical structures,
- choose trees that are suitable for this region's climate and that are able to withstand storms,

- leave a travel path down the right-of-way and do not block access to towers and structures,
- never plant trees directly beneath power lines.

Each year, fallen and cut trees cause dozens of outages that affect BPA customers and threaten public safety. Tree-related power outages are more than just an inconvenience. Fire departments, police and hospitals all depend on a reliable supply of electricity to respond to emergencies.

BPA has developed a danger tree program to promote transmission line safety and assist property owners with their responsibility to keep trees and other vegetation at a safe distance from power lines. The program offers tree inspections and removal services to owners of property with potential power hazards along BPA high-voltage lines.

“Citizen involvement is essential for general electrical safety, and it’s needed to make the danger tree program effective,” said BPA transmission line manager Randy Melzer. “As people clean up after winter damage, cut firewood or plant more trees, they can easily avoid danger by being aware of power lines.”

Call 1-800-622-4520 for more information or to receive the following brochures:

[Living and Working Safely Around High-Voltage Power Lines](#)

[Landowner’s Guide to Trees and Transmission Lines](#)

[Landowner’s Guide to Use of BPA Right-of-Way](#)

[The Shocking Truth About Trees and Transmission Lines](#)

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For more information, contact Sharon Blair at BPA, 503-230-7390, skblair@bpa.gov.
