



Recent power outages caused by trees

Property owners can take steps to help prevent future tree-caused outages

Bonneville Power Administration

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BOISE, Idaho — The incredible influence possessed by a single tree should never be underestimated, say experts at the Bonneville Power Administration, so property owners who plant and prune trees near BPA power lines are being asked to help reduce outages in the area by keeping trees safely distanced from lines.

A single tree is what started a widespread power outage that affected 2 million people in 14 western states on Tuesday, July 2. The outage occurred when electricity jumped from a 345,000-volt transmission line in Wyoming to a cottonwood that had grown too close to the line. This incident, combined with a number of unusual operating conditions, led to outages in many parts of the West.

In order to keep electricity flowing reliably while maintaining low rates, the Bonneville Power Administration is asking people to help by ensuring that trees and other potential hazards are safely distanced from transmission lines.

“Trees don’t have to cut off power to become a problem,” said Darrel VanCoevinger, BPA system operations manager. “In many cases, they can cause damage. That means we must replace or repair equipment — which winds up being more costly for electricity users.”

Trees need not touch power lines to be dangerous. Lines often sag when carrying a lot of electricity or during hot weather. Electricity can jump from wires to nearby trees, causing wildfires or harm to people nearby. Plus, as the summer warming trend continues, it is highly likely that some lines will sag, increasing the chances for a dangerous hazard. This, coupled with the threat of widespread fires, could endanger the lives and property of thousands of people.

Safely growing trees and shrubs can make the difference between beautiful landscapes and safety hazards. To ensure your safety, only trained experts should remove trees that are close to transmission lines.

Individuals can help by contacting BPA if they notice anything that interferes with transmission equipment. Potential problems can be prevented by following these simple rules when planting trees on property near BPA-owned power lines:

- apply for a BPA planting permit

- don't plant within 30 feet of towers, poles or ground-based electrical structures
- limit trees and shrubs in these areas to no more than 20 feet in height
- choose trees that are able to withstand Northwest storm conditions
- never plant a tree directly beneath a power line

Each year, trees that have fallen, have been cut, or were improperly planted cause dozens of outages that affect electric utility customers and threaten public safety. In the past year, 18 percent of the tree-caused outages on the BPA power system in the region were the result of human action — either from trees being cut or from growing trees too close to the lines.

These tree-related power outages are more than just an inconvenience. Fire departments, police and hospitals are all dependent upon a reliable supply of electricity to be able to respond to emergencies. Additionally, individuals on life support devices also are threatened by these electrical outages, and there are many dangers and inconveniences caused by outages to traffic lights.

BPA has developed a “Danger Tree” program to promote transmission line safety and assist property owners with their responsibility to keep trees and vegetation a safe distance from power lines and equipment. The program offers property inspections and maintenance work 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,” says BPA transmission line manager Randy Melzer. “As people take advantage of warm weather for recreation or yard work, 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](#)

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