



Tree Risk Management

Trees provide a host of valuable environmental, economic and aesthetic benefits. They improve our quality of life. They complement our communities by easing the transitions between industrial, commercial and residential land uses. They buffer our thoroughfares and add value to our property. Yet as we take pleasure in the fall colors and enjoy the benefits of cooling shade and increased property values, we have a responsibility to assess and minimize risks associated with the forest canopy.

Tree risk management is an ongoing responsibility for all tree owners, not only for one's personal property, but for potential damage to adjacent properties and public infrastructure. A key part of risk management is a thorough assessment of a tree's structural integrity, which usually requires the expertise of an experienced tree care professional such as a certified arborist. A Certified Arborist is a tree care professional certified by the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA). These individuals may work individually or with a tree care company, but all provide the necessary assessments that determine a tree's structural health.

The initial tree risk assessment has little to do with how a tree "looks." A thorough, defensible tree assessment follows a predetermined checklist, starting at the base of the tree and moving up the trunk to the crown. Each part of the tree is analyzed for strength or lack of it, to determine the overall integrity of the tree. These assessments often reveal branch or stem damage risks that may not be apparent to the untrained eye. Assessments can also reveal infrastructure damage to walkways, driveways, foundations, waterlines and other structures, for which a certified arborist can provide recommendations.

A proper assessment identifies:

- Exposed and damaged roots and mushrooms on root collars
- Trunk cavities and fungal cankers along trunk and main stem
- Splits or cavities in main stems and central leaders
- Dead or dying branches and poor-sealing pruning cuts
- Crown dieback
- Other insect and disease issues

Tree risk management is an ongoing part of land ownership and a responsibility that cannot be ignored. Annual tree assessments are a good way to manage risk and provide for a better, safer forest canopy.