

Getting Trees Hurricane Ready

Samuel E. Hand, Jr. and Edwin R. Duke



FLORIDA A&M UNIVERSITY
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Every year, just before the beginning of the hurricane season, Many homeowners frantically seek professional assistance assessing the condition of their larger mature trees to determine if any of them present a significant risk to them or their neighbors property should they be subjected to significantly high seasonal winds. Most people can recognize such structural problems as major decay in the main trunk of a tree, if they take the time to look, but the vast majority of problems that can lead to structural failure are not commonly recognized by the layman.

Genetic flaws such as multi trunk trees, like Live Oak, Bradford Pear, etc., will lead to major failure as the individual trunks grow in girth and eventually push each other off.



Figure 1. Multi-trunked trees, like this Live Oak, often fail as the individual trunks increase in girth and press against one another.

Internal decay, which may only show a small fruiting conk on the bark, can be digesting the structural cellulose inside the tree. Root damage caused by heavy equipment, or trenching operations only a foot or so deep, can destroy the structural support of the roots that hold the tree up. Stress cracks caused by high storm winds or lightning strikes can leave the tree susceptible to failure due to decay or future storm events.



Figure 2. Stress cracks, like this one due to high winds, make the tree susceptible to failure.

Edwin R. Duke, Associate Professor, College of Agriculture and Food Sciences; FAMU Cooperative Extension, Tallahassee, FL 32307. Samuel E. Hand, Jr., Associate Professor and Director of Industry Credentialing Training Programs, FAMU Cooperative Extension, Tallahassee, FL 32307.

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Whatever the reason, it is important that persons owning trees realize that they are not only responsible for their personal safety, but they are also responsible for the public's safety and welfare relative to their trees. Therefore, if the property owner is not personally well versed in recognizing the signs and indicators of potential tree hazards, he or she should have periodic inspections provided by qualified persons, trained to recognize and evaluate potential hazards. This person should also be able to provide information as to options available to make the situation safer. These options may include pruning to remove weak, damaged or dead limbs. It might also be necessary to provide structural enhancement to strengthen significant or historic trees that have conditions which a pruning remedy might destroy. In some cases, options may be limited to simply removing the tree. In all cases though, the end result should be the reduction of liability to an appropriate level, while also using a remedy that does not destroy the trees ability to remain healthy and attractive.

So, who is qualified to assist in this process? Fortunately, in the Panhandle Area of North Florida, we have an abundance of such persons. They are Professional Certified Arborists who adhere to the rigorous standards set by the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) (<https://www.isa-arbor.com>). They have taken and passed the ISA Certification Examination and have demonstrated their experience and competency in the field of arboriculture. These ISA Certified Arborists are familiar with the types of concerns and problems that can lead to hazardous conditions with trees and are also qualified to offer solutions (and may also provide services) to mitigate the potential liability these trees present to both property and persons. Recently, ISA has developed an advanced certification, TRAQ, which stands for Tree Risk Assessment Qualification. This credential is for

arborists who specialize in dealing with hazardous tree management and structural tree liability mitigation operations. You can verify the arborist's certification status by going to the ISA website and researching the individual you are considering hiring for either hazard diagnosis or remedial tree work.

Last, but not least, the final element in determining who to retain to provide professional assistance in diagnosing and/or providing tree care operations for hazardous trees is proper and adequate insurance coverage. Persons or businesses providing these hazard review services should be fully covered with professional liability insurance, sometimes called errors and emissions insurance. If they are also providing the remedial structural enhancement and tree care operations for hazardous trees, they should also provide documentation of their general liability, workman's compensation, and completed operations coverages. General liability to cover damage or injury to persons or property, workman's compensation to protect the client from claims from workmen injured on the job, and completed operations coverage so that the work done will still be covered, even if the consultant has gone out of business and is no longer paying for general liability coverage on his work.

Finally, whenever you are planning any type of site improvements, or construction activities, which can adversely impact your trees, above or below ground, seek the assistance of qualified professionals in advance of such activities so as to avoid making mistakes that can result in your specimen trees becoming a liability threat to you or to the general public as they grow and mature in the years ahead.