

# PREVENTING

## THE Non-Preventable Tree-related Outage

By Peter S. Carris, System Arborist, Peninsula Light Company, Gig Harbor, WA

Preventing tree-related outages on a limited budget can be tough enough, but how can you lessen non-preventable tree related outages?

In conversation with a utility arborist north of the border, I learned of a small windstorm that put many residents out of power. When the area utility arborist was asked how many tree related outages had occurred, the answer was, "None, they were all designated as storm outages". In my experience working for different utilities, categorizing tree related outages

seems to differ greatly from region to region, even utility to utility. Through different conversations with my peers, I have found the preventable tree related outage and the non-preventable tree related outage seem to be popular vegetation associated outage designations.

The preventable tree related outage seems to be the easiest one to define. *Any tree related outage due to growth appears to be the most popular definition. At our utility, I have included the addition of, and any tree or branch within the utility corridor that could have been foreseen to create an outage within the next maintenance cycle (i.e. long standing dead tree, insufficient overhang clearance), And any vegetation outage that had its direct cause related to unapproved practices, (i.e. topping, improper directional pruning, etc.).*

The tough one then becomes giving a true, trackable definition of a non-preventable tree related outage that can be of any use. Some say the definition is *any tree or branch outside the utility corridor.* Enough said about definitions, they are all tree-related outages, and we as utility arborists would or should like to reduce them as much as possible. I was asked one time by an assistant to the superintendent, "How can we prevent non-preventable tree related outages?" At first I laughed,

thinking it was an oxymoron, but further thought led me to 'push the envelope' and come up with some helpful hints.

**Know the primary failures of your most popular species**

Since many species or trees in the same genus have diseases that particular attack them (i.e. American Elms and Dutch elm disease), getting to know the signs and symptoms of the disease is crucial. In the Pacific Northwest, my area is predominately Douglas Fir (Pseudotsuga



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menziesii). As a utility arborist, our costly outages are due to whole tree failure due to laminated root rot. The symptoms are hard to see since the fruiting bodies do not show up until years after the tree has been on the forest floor, but a pocket of less susceptible maples and alders growing in a pure dominate, undisturbed fir stand is a convincing sign.

**Present your knowledge at workshops and public gatherings**

When I come upon a customer who is unhappy about the vegetation maintenance that has taken place at their property, I look upon them as a student in need of knowledge about many subjects such as mature heights, disease diagnoses and acceptable pruning practices. These people can be your eyes and ears in the field, teach them all you can. They are the ones that can prevent their trees from becoming non-preventable tree related outages. Imagine Mrs. Smith

Year	Non-Prevent	Preventable	Total Tree Outages	Total Outages	% of Tree Outages
1990			202	495	0.41
1991			137	452	0.3
1992	94	44	138	535	0.25
1993	75	55	130	388	0.33
1994	65	66	131	456	0.28
1995	65	65	130	536	0.24
1996	54	40	94	521	0.26
1997	62	19	81	410	0.19
1998	47	13	60	435	0.13
1999	68	2	70	339	0.2

calling you and asking, "My husband and I were thinking of planting trees under 3 spans of your transmission line, which species would you prefer, Redwoods, Sycamores or a small variety of Japanese maple".

**Teach your tree crews what you know**

A repetitive job such as 'line clearance' can become a little boring at times. Instead of removing

dead trees as fast as possible, take some time and gather the crew to discuss what most possibly killed this tree. Look at similar trees with early signs of the disease. It will give the crew more respect for their positions, help communications between foreman and homeowners, and you will get some 'off the right of way' trees out before they hit the line.