

AN EFFECTIVE TREE TRIMMING PROGRAM¹

by Leslie A. Bell

This report discusses the organization and the establishment of an "effective tree trimming program." It is not the intent to discuss specifications or standards. These are prepared by each utility after consideration of variances encountered due to types of trees in the locality, weather conditions, climate, etc., and becomes a separate and important function of the program.

An effective tree trimming program must contain a number of "do's and don'ts." The "do's" are our first consideration and, if followed effectively, should be the ones that give us noteworthy results.

To set up an effective program we must become familiar with and analyze all facets of the area and the system on which the program is expected to operate, namely: 1) miles of line to be cleared, 2) types of line to be cleared, transmission or distribution, 3) voltage to be considered and the electrical and safe working clearances to be maintained, 4) types of construction and anything peculiar to a specific construction, 5) types of terrain to be encountered (desert to forest, mountains and flatland), 6) make-up of the area, rural, metropolitan, cabin, and recreational, city and if this doesn't pose enough challenges, 7) the types of people and the variety of agencies that must be recognized, city, county, state, federal, and ecological.

This appears to be an insurmountable project, but if we approach it in a manner similar to eating an elephant "one bite at a time" we may find a logical solution to each of the various facets. The better the plan or solution for each facet, the more effective the program.

The problem at hand is maintaining lines that serve the customers' needs for electrical energy with a minimum of tree-related outages. We must maintain a balance between the desire of the public for the beauty of trees and their need for electrical service. We recognize that tree-related outages will never be entirely eliminated. We must always have "tree awareness" in our minds when

attempting to reach an acceptable level in these outages. Today the public is aware of nature, of trees. Groups are constantly acquainting us with the things about us that must be preserved for those who follow. We must work with these groups and make them aware of our problems and the ways they can help to reach an acceptable solution.

At the present time, our area is composed of approximately 6500 miles of transmission lines in Utah, Idaho, and Wyoming, in terrain varying from forest to desert, rural to metropolitan, cabin and recreational. We operate with four company crews—two 4-man crews with lift truck and chip truck, one 3-man crew with lift truck, and one 2-man crew with lift truck. Twenty-two contract crews from Asplundh and Davey companies perform the major portion of the work in our organization. Contract crews consist of eight foot crews (one 3-man crew, and seven 4-man crews) with 13 lift or street crews (all 2-man crews except one), with 3 men and a follow-up chip truck to operate in outlying areas. We also employ one specialized removal crew for removal of problem trees. This crew operates with 3 men and a special truck with a loader.

To maintain control of contract crews we have rigid specifications for bidding. The specifications describe equipment as well as qualifications and experience for the crew members. Control is also accomplished by having one man responsible for the overall program including: 1) areas of crew assignment, 2) call-out for trouble, 3) special assignments for new construction, and 4) specials which are included in a troubleman's report.

After a crew has been assigned to an area, every effort should be made to keep them in this area. We find the foreman and the crew establishing a rapport with the public in the area which is helpful in the operation and a big factor in bringing about increased production. The foreman

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knows that Mrs. James is fussy, John Doe is very cooperative, and Sam Smith will allow you to pull in his field to complete your work. The crew becomes familiar with line routing and the types of trees in the area.

When our crews are assigned to an area they do a complete area trim, rotating within the area in a cycle. They vary from the schedule as little as possible. All variances of "specials" are previously checked except those reported by a troubleman as a result of an outage. The tree crew does not check customer calls. Foremen are required to report the address and name, if available, of refusals to grant permission to trim.

Call-outs and special assignments are handled by the individual in charge of all crews. Communication between the contract tree crews and utility company crews via radio is not advisable. The control individual should build up a spirit of cooperation and confidence between crews and between himself and the crews. The crews, and especially the foremen, should feel confident in the decisions they are required to make. The control individual should support the decision of the foreman. If a decision is overruled, be sure the foreman is involved in the final discussion with the customer. The foreman is your most important line of communication with the public. Use him this way.

Competition can be a very helpful tool, competition between crews and between companies. Maintaining at least two tree companies on contract eliminates the attitude of complacency.

Evaluating the program must be a constant operation. Some tools that are necessary for effective evaluation are: 1) foreman's weekly tree trimming report giving all pertinent information relating to the crew's operation for the week; manhours worked, number and size of trees trimmed and/or removed, type of crew, productive and nonproductive time as contained in the crew log, and 2) individual crew records (weekly, yearly) of past performance.

A formula must be established to reduce each report to a unit basis. Unit values must be placed on each tree based on time to trim or size of removal. To make the unit system meaningful, a tree audit must be conducted in the field. These audits should be on a random basis and should check tree counts and reporting accuracy. The

tree audit gives the utility representative and the tree company representative a good first-hand look at the accomplishments of each foreman and crew. It also affords a good opportunity for both representatives to discuss irregularities in the work. The crew log, which accounts for all crew time each day, can then be used to good advantage in the final analysis to evaluate actual productivity.

Be certain that all crews working on one property are familiar with the total objective of the job and supply them with all the necessary tools to handle the project. Forms are essential. Trimming permission slips are required when the homeowner is not present and removal slips must be signed before a tree is removed. The foremen must be familiar with agreements with governmental agencies, i.e., a city agreement that allows for trimming any city tree, with the only request being that an attempt be made to notify the owner of an adjoining property of our intent to trim. All crews must understand that any tree trimmed by them is to be left in a condition that is safe for the homeowner to perform further work if he so desires.

Educate the public about the why and how of tree trimming to maintain electrical clearances. Show them that we are also aware of the value of trees in our lives.

A few words about the don'ts. Don't forget your crews. Communicate with them and show an interest in what they are doing. Don't ignore the public. Find an equitable solution as soon as possible after a problem occurs. Don't always point out the failures. Recognize success. Don't forget that the work you are doing is on someone else's tree and on their property. You must come back time after time, so cultivate proper relationships.

Remember, analyze, organize, control, evaluate, and familiarize. Maintain constant contact with the crews. A good worker who doesn't get proper recognition soon loses interest and becomes complacent. Be sure to let the crews know their importance to the total operation. They are the best tool you have.

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