

Just as risk managers assess other infrastructure to protect workers and users so should they be involved in managing the risk posed by, and to, urban forests.

URBAN FOREST RISK MANAGEMENT NECESSARY

Municipalities have a responsibility to develop and maintain safe, pleasing and beneficial urban forests. Urban foresters and risk managers need to address the risks that both threaten the viability of the forest and to protect this valuable asset and to reduce the likelihood of injury or damage caused by tree failure.

Risk managers are often overlooked resource uninvited to discussions of risk assessments - climate change, disease, infestation, weather events, and so on. You can be an asset to the team assessing and prioritizing risks – and help develop strategies that will prevent occurrences and minimize harm.

Trees are a valued part of the urban environment. Their shade and beauty contribute to the community's quality of life and soften the hard appearance of concrete structures, parking lots, and streets. They provide important environmental benefits from absorbing carbon and other chemicals to reducing storm water run-off and providing wildlife habitat. They visually enhance neighbourhoods and are acknowledged to increase residential and commercial real estate values. Communities with healthy urban forest are more attractive to citizens and those who consider moving there.

Increasingly, technology has improved municipalities' ability to create an urban forest inventory that provides three important pieces of data:

1. Species identification, along with age, size and tree health,
2. Ability to identify and monitor pest damage, disease, and
3. Proactively plan for maintenance work, to document citizen complaints, and to record on-going and completed maintenance.

This data further lets forestry management adequately identify needed resources to maintain and expand tree cover in growing municipalities.

Unhealthy trees are likely to fail prematurely leading to third party injury, property damage, road blockages, power outages and the loss of the tree itself. Today's urban landscape is increasingly crowded with hard

infrastructure (buildings, streets, parking lots, utilities, and so on.) Overcrowding, large expanses of pavement, and pollution, all make it difficult for trees to thrive for their full, natural life cycle. When assessing the risk of harm or damage to third parties, three typical considerations are:

1. **Likelihood of Failure:** are there structural conditions that may lead to failure? (e.g. broken branches, cracks in the trunk, or dead or dying areas),
2. **Impact Target:** what is the chance of a tree hitting people, buildings, or other property? (human safety is always top priority!), and
3. **Consequences of Failure:** Considerations include the length and weight of the tree or limb, whether it will roll downhill or remain in place, etc.

Conclusion

While the overall risk to human safety from tree failure is exceedingly low, it is important to measure this risk as a key factor when focusing on tree management in the urban environment. Prioritizing risk adequately requires taking into account tree placement. I.e. is it in an area frequented by people - along sidewalks or park pathways - or in the middle of an environmentally significant area? A 2011 study conducted by the National Tree Safety Group in the United Kingdom determined that, excluding high wind events, that the risk of death caused by a tree is one in 10 million for trees in, or adjacent to areas of public use.

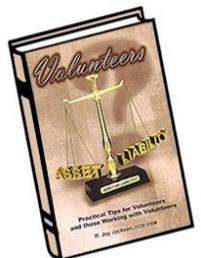
We know that tree owners are not expected to guarantee that a tree is safe. Owner only need take the level of reasonable care that a reasonable and prudent owner, But, we also know that inevitably if a tree or limb kills or seriously harms a member of the public there will be media attention, because this event is unusual and therefore newsworthy. Media attention should not affect the risk assessment result, but it is important to balance this attention with the very real public desire to retain and preserve large, and old, trees.

Ultimately, the basic rules of risk management apply to urban forestry as they do to all other risks: Identify, Analyze, Evaluate, Treat then Monitor and Review. These remain the best way to demonstrate due diligence!

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