

# Tree Removal Safety

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Highway and Public Works Departments are tasked with identifying and managing roadside hazards that may endanger vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Careful removal of dead or dying trees prevents them from falling on roadways. Branches must not obstruct road signs or line of sight in traffic intersections. Tree growth should not shade roadways in winter and inhibit the sun's melting of dangerous ice.

Tree removal is one of the most dangerous activities your workers engage in. The injury and death rate even among highly trained professionals in the tree management and logging industry is among the highest of any occupation. Often the time for training and skill development in tree removal and trimming is limited by the broad scope of most highway and public works department activities.

To meet the New York State Public Safety and Health Guidelines, you as an employer are responsible to provide training in the use of chainsaws, chippers, personal protective equipment and work zone safety. The training must be conducted by qualified instructors and documented. In addition, training must be performed when new equipment is acquired or if current practices do not conform to safety standards.

The management of your work zone must be addressed in a most cautious manner. Tree work requires adequate on-site personnel to assure that tree cutters, ground crew and flaggers are well protected and that no one employee has multiple

responsibilities. For example, one individual should not be charged with flagging and manning the chipper. Likewise, in rural locations, accidents may occur. Proper work zone safety should include a clear path of escape for the tree cutter and ground crew. When setting up your work zone, all possible outcomes should be taken into consideration.

The work performed by your DPW or Highway Department along public highways and sidewalks requires protection for the public. Flaggers must stop cars well beyond the area where a tree may drop. When determining a safe distance, you must take into account the direction of fall may be different from the intended direction. Pedestrians should be prohibited from entering the work zone for any reason.

Consequently, it is important to make careful decisions regarding the appropriate means of removing trees and branches. Prepare an objective assessment for each job to evaluate whether your Highway or Public Works Department can perform the task in a manner that assures their employees' safety and the public's safety. If local governments do not have the necessary internal resources, a professional tree removal contractor may provide the optimal solution.

Besides the issue of liability and the potential for serious penalties imposed by the New York State Department of Labor, the goal is for all workers and pedestrians to return home in the same condition they started the day.

