

EXCERPT FROM CITY OF FIFE URBAN FORESTRY MANAGEMENT PLAN

Storm/Emergency Response

Large regional storms have become more common in the South Puget Sound area over the last several years. It is desirable, therefore, to develop a detailed emergency response plan that incorporates prioritization of work on the city's trees for safe, effective and efficient mitigation and clean-up. Even small disaster or hazard events benefit from a thorough preparation, resulting in a fast, effective response that keeps costs and inconvenience to the public to a minimum.

Small municipalities typically rely heavily on utility providers, private arborists and tree care companies, and neighboring municipalities for aid and assistance during and after natural disasters. In any emergency, public safety is top priority as the City and its partners respond. One City staff person should be designated as the lead on tree-related emergency response planning and activities. The designee should be trained to prioritize tree damage relative to immediate public concerns and evaluate tree safety after the initial response period to assure continued public safety. A copy of the City's Emergency Response Plan should be available to all City staff and citizens, and periodically reviewed for accuracy and appropriateness.

Relationships with emergency response partners should be built in advance to the greatest extent possible. This may include Memorandums of Understanding among governments and utility providers, and standing agreements or contracts with private contractors. Areas of responsibility, reciprocal assistance expectations and estimated costs to Fife should be incorporated into such agreements.

Potential emergency response partners for Fife include:

- City of Edgewood
- City of Milton
- City of Tacoma
- Joint Base Lewis McChord
- Pierce County
- Puget Sound Energy
- Puyallup Tribe
- local arborists and tree care firms
- communications and cable providers

Washington State law provides that ONLY trained personnel shall work on or near power lines at any time. Puget Sound Energy and its arboricultural subcontractor, Asplundh Tree Expert Company, are important partners for Fife to work with while developing emergency operations plans. Charged power lines present a daunting challenge during emergency response operations, and may be the most dangerous activity during such times. Safety of City staff and other personnel is as important as public safety during emergency response operations.

A list of equipment and vehicles available for triage and tree work during emergency response operations should be developed and kept current. The list should include barriers to close access to streets and sidewalks, caution banners and tape, traffic control equipment, and safety vests and other personal safety gear such as hardhats.

Priorities for tree damage cleanup post-event:

Class I Threats to life and public safety are top priority. Clearance of major arterials that provide access to medical facilities and emergency services such as the Fire Department is included in Class I. These should be mapped in advance and included in Emergency Response Planning manuals, so that it is immediately clear to personnel where first response should be focused. Initial response may require line-certified arborists as first-on-site due to power line involvement (tree limbs or whole trees over lines, broken lines caught in tree limbs, exploded transformers close to trees, etc.). Final cleanup should wait until emergency response is complete.

Class II Major limbs or whole trees obstructing streets and sidewalks or damaging service buildings should be remedied to the extent that crisis is abated. Final cleanup should wait until emergency response is complete.

- NOTE: Under normal circumstances, all tree work on private property is the responsibility of the property owner. If, however, a Class I or Class II-type situation requires immediate attention on private property for the protection of public or community safety in the opinion of police, the Fire Department or Emergency Operations Manager, and/or emergency response personnel may take necessary action to abate the defined hazard. Proper insurance must be in place to cover potential liability.

Class III Remaining main thoroughfares, state and county highways and other preferential traffic corridors shall be cleared of tree obstructions, along with developed parks, to the extent that crisis is abated and public safety is protected. Heavily used trails in natural parks and open spaces may also fall into Class III. Final cleanup should wait until emergency response is complete.

Class IV Residential streets and sidewalks should be remedied to the extent that crisis is abated. Final cleanup should wait until emergency response is complete.

Final cleanup should follow the same response sequence (major arterials and services; main traffic corridors; developed parks and trails; residential streets and sidewalks). A clear understanding among City staff, partnering personnel and City residents about priorities in emergency response and cleanup will help to ensure smooth, efficient operations that proceed quickly with minimized hazard to everyone involved.

A post-event survey should be made to identify trees that require remedial trimming of broken branches or branch stubs, re-shaping or re-balancing of the canopy, or additional remedial work required due to damage. It is important that the tree lead be trained in hazard tree evaluation and assessment, or that an arborist with such training be retained to make these evaluations, in order to best protect public safety and reduce liability risk to the City. All post-event reports should be written and filed for future reference. Replacement of trees removed during the emergency response period and those removed after evaluation should be planned as part of long-term emergency response and sustainability practices.

Other components of an emergency response plan for Fife's trees should include:

- Establishment of a clear chain of command
- Crew communications during and after emergency operations
- Brush removal and disposal
- Large wood (large limbs, trunks and whole trees) removal and disposal
- Record keeping, including a log of emergency service activities, property damage due to trees, cost accounting and inventory updates

Responsibilities of Emergency Response Tree Lead:

- Performs initial storm damage assessment and triage, and reports to the Emergency Operations Manager, City Manager, Public Works Director and Parks Director regarding decisions related to cleanup efforts and advises on the need for outside assistance such as contractors and partner municipalities.
- Prioritizes tree-related work relative to public safety concerns and other demands on available personnel.
- Contacts utility providers, local arborists and tree care firms, and partnering agencies and municipalities to coordinate activities.
- Coordinates and assigns duties to City crews and partners relative to tree-related activities to ensure field crew safety and effective, efficient storm cleanup.
- Coordinates activities related to staffing, equipment use, disposal of wood waste and inventory updates.
- Reports progress on a regular basis the Emergency Operations Manager, City Manager, Public Works Director and Parks Director.
- Works with City communications staff to alert citizens to cleanup work in progress through local media and the City's website.
- Works with City communications staff to respond to citizen concerns in a timely manner.
- Performs or supervises post-event evaluation or assessment of trees called into question during the event, but not qualifying as immediately hazardous.

It cannot be overemphasized that proper tree care, particularly structural training through proper pruning practices during the first 10 years of a tree's life, will reduce tree damage and minimize the expense associated with tree damage, mitigation and cleanup.