

Tree Talk

Ice Damaged Trees



It's hard to picture the damage that ice, winds and heavy snow can cause to trees until you have experienced it yourself. Last week's freezing rain and strong winds have caused major problems with trees around eastern South Dakota, especially in our communities. The over-planted green ash tree has seen significant damage. "When a tree species is over-planted, improperly pruned, and mismanaged, it runs the risk of severe damage during events like the recent ice and wind storm" says Aaron Kiesz, State Urban Forestry Coordinator for the South Dakota Department of Agriculture. Many of the trees that failed during the storm failed because of multiple leaders, poor branching structure, and bad pruning cuts such as 'topping' cuts. Topping, or cutting the top of a tree off, is extremely damaging and is strongly discouraged. Many communities around the nation have developed anti-topping ordinances to stop this harmful practice.

Homeowners tend to plant fast growing trees such as ash, maples, birches, and poplars, which have brittle wood and develop weak, V-shaped crotches that easily split apart under added weight. Often, trees can incur severe damage because of internal rot and decay that is not evident from the exterior.

For homeowners that have trees damaged by ice and wind storms, two questions must be asked. First, does the condition of the tree justify efforts to save it, or should it be removed? Trees with extensive damage can be very expensive to repair and should only be attempted if there is a significant portion of the tree still intact. Second, can you handle the pruning and removing yourself, or should you seek professional help? Small branches and limbs, if broken, should be removed to the next major limb or back to the trunk. Larger limbs and hanging limbs should be left for a professional. If you need to hire a professional, make sure they carry proper liability and workmen's compensation insurance before allowing them to start the job.

For further assistance, please call 1-800-228-5254 or email Aaron Kiesz at SDRCF@state.sd.us or visit our website at www.state.sd.us/doa/forestry

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