

Vegetation Management Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Why does OG&E clear vegetation away from power lines?

A. Preventing tree conflicts is better than waiting for a problem to occur.

Trees that grow into power lines can cause problems three ways:

- **Safety** — Trees and tree limbs can knock down power lines, causing a safety hazard for our customers. In addition, it's possible to be shocked by simply touching a tree in contact with high voltage wires. Power lines are just as dangerous if touched by someone climbing in a tree as they would be if touched by someone standing on the ground. Trees and limbs also compromise the safety of our employees due to visibility and other obstructions.
- **Outages** — Tree limbs contacting power lines are one of the most common causes of power outages. Trees can affect service reliability at the precise location where a tree may contact a line, at nearby locations on that line or at other distant locations on the electric grid. Trees or limbs can fall across wires, causing power failures. High growing bushes, shrubs, vines and trees may cause electrical blinks and flickers. If you have concerns about trees or vines growing near power lines, contact us. To be safe, never attempt to prune a tree near our wires yourself.
- **Voltage Loss** — Trees touching power lines drain electricity off the electrical system. The resulting voltage loss can affect customers all along the electrical circuit serving your neighborhood. Low voltage can damage motor-driven appliances (refrigerators, air conditioners, etc.) and sensitive electronics in your home. Neighboring businesses, schools and medical facilities can be affected the same way.

Q. How often does OG&E clear trees from its lines?

A. Our goal is to clear lines of limbs and trees on a four-year maintenance cycle, which has been determined to be the best compromise between providing safe, reliable power and managing vegetation costs. We contract with hundreds of professional arborists who work year-round. Trees may need to be pruned more often in rare situations where growing conditions or other variables make four years of clearance impractical. In some areas it may be longer than four years between tree pruning activities, depending on environmental conditions.

Q. How will I know when you are trimming in my area?

A. We send letters to every customer on a circuit in advance of routine trimming. As a courtesy we routinely place notices on the doors of homes and other buildings to notify occupants.

Q. How far do you trim the trees from the lines?

A. In the case of most trees, we prune between 10 feet and 14 feet from the wires. It is possible some trees may be pruned further, if species or conditions warrant. Trees with trunks close to the power lines require much heavier pruning than trees located further from the line. When pruning operations are performed, our trimming experts make every attempt to prune sufficient clearance so that the tree will remain safe until we return on our next routine maintenance, approximately every four years. Trees directly under the wires or close to poles are likely to be removed if they are a large growing species. Our tree experts work in accordance with International Society of Arborists (ISA) standards and accepted industry practices.

Q. Can I trim my own trees?

A. Pruning trees around power lines should only be completed by trained professionals. Serious injuries and even fatalities have occurred when untrained individuals attempt to clear trees near power lines. Please contact us for an evaluation of the trees and vegetation around power lines prior to trimming them yourself or hiring a private arborist. State and federal safety regulations require any person working within 10 feet of a high-voltage electrical line to have proper training and certification.

Q. Do you trim trees from the wire that runs from the pole to my house?

A. Maintaining clearance around the service drop (the lines that run from the pole to a home) is a property owner's responsibility. Although the voltage through a service drop is much lower than that of pole-to-pole power lines, we recommend that you use a professional tree service to do this trimming. A professional tree service does not need line clearance certification to prune near your service drop. For property owners who prefer to do it themselves, we strongly encourage a call to OG&E Customer Service to request a temporary service disconnect to prevent electrocution.

Q. Can I hire my own arborist to prune the trees from the lines?

A. Line Clearance work is different from other forms of tree care in that the insurance and training requirements are much different. Any arborist that works on a tree within 10 feet of power lines is technically working "on the electric system" and must have permission from the system operator. For this reason, OG&E only allows approved Line Clearance contractors to work near their power lines for the safety of the arborist and the public.

Many independent tree trimmers claim they are "line-clearance certified." Some may have worked for a qualified line-clearance tree company. However, certification is not transferable between companies, unless the company is line-clearance qualified.

If you have a dead tree, or are planning to have work done on a tree closer than 10 feet to the power lines, please contact OG&E for a safety inspection. OG&E is committed to safety and in some cases we may need to make the tree "safe" for removal.

Q. How much will this cost me?

A. Line clearance is a normal maintenance procedure. There is no direct charge to the customer. Keep in mind, however, all customers are essentially paying for the maintenance and upkeep of the lines, poles and other equipment that deliver power to their homes and businesses. For this reason, it is essential that new trees be planted away from power lines to prevent the need for trimming, help keep rates low and ensure safe, reliable power.

Q. Where can I get more information about the proper care and placement of trees?

A. The right tree planted in the right place can provide not only beauty but energy savings for your home. Consider cooling shade from deciduous trees on the south and west side of the home and shelter from cold winter winds by evergreens on the north and northwest side of your home.

Basically, always look up before planting and observe the following guidelines:

- Never plant trees or shrubs directly under power lines or within 6 feet of poles or pedestals (green electrical boxes)
- Small, maturing trees and shrubs that will grow to 15' should be planted at least 5' laterally from power lines
- Medium, maturing trees that will grow to 40' should be planted at least 20' from power lines
- Large, maturing trees should be planted a minimum of 50' from power lines.

A good rule of thumb is to check the tag at the nursery. The maximum height of the tree should be approximately how far the tree should be planted from the power lines. Care also should be taken to find out where underground facilities are located before you plant by dialing 8-1-1. Trees should be planted at least six feet to the side of underground facilities. Underground utility cables and equipment need to be accessible for maintenance and repair.

Q. Why don't you put all the power lines underground?

A. Some lines cannot be feasibly placed underground. We place our lines underground in new residential developments but there are many obstacles to placing lines underground in established neighborhoods. Existing trees and their root systems would be impacted, undermining the health and stability of those trees. Considerable expense, time and disruption would be involved in trenching through existing roads and landscaping. Most homes in neighborhoods with overhead lines would also require major upgrades to accept underground service. The cost of such a major overhaul to the utility infrastructure would be significant and would be passed, in part, to our customers (you) in the form of higher electric rates and directly as all individual homes would likely need service upgrades which would be the responsibility of the homeowner. Other utilities, such as phone and cable, also may be using the same poles as the power lines, so removal of the power lines may still leave other overhead lines.

Q. Is OG&E responsible for clean-up after pruning trees?

A. The majority of our pruning and cutting occurs during routine line maintenance cycles. Our policy is to chip and haul small limbs and brush that are pruned or removed during the course of normal maintenance work. Any wood larger than 4 inches in diameter may be cut into manageable lengths (firewood) and stacked on site for your use. When an "Act of Nature" (such as lightning, high winds, tornadoes, etc.) causes trees or other vegetation to fall across power lines and create power outages, we cut the trees and brush so poles and lines can be replaced and re-energized. Disposal of any wood, limbs or debris resulting from this type of emergency operation is the property owner's responsibility.

Q. Why don't you paint or repair cuts made from pruning?

A. Painting cuts has been found to be ineffective and in some cases detrimental for preventing disease and reducing tree-stress from pruning.

Q. What if my tree is away from the lines, but its branches grow out above the wires?

A. The primary action will be to prune the branches away from the line, removing all overhanging branches. Trees also may be selected for removal in situations where certain hazards exist.

Q. What if I don't want my trees trimmed?

A. OG&E is committed to balancing the importance of trees with the equally important need to provide reliable electricity to all customers. Keep in mind that although it is desirable to keep the natural beauty of a tree, tree contact with power lines is unsafe and also could cause momentary outages and/or lengthy loss of service, not only for you but for many residents and businesses in your neighborhood.

When OG&E identifies tree pruning or pole clearing work to be done on your property, reasonable efforts will be made to notify you. While it is our intention to work with all customers to address their concerns, OG&E is legally required to maintain its facilities, and therefore permission to prune trees is not required. Utility easements and rights of ways are often conveyed in the deed to a property. In addition, as a condition of your agreement to allow OG&E representatives access to your property for maintenance at all reasonable times.

Q. Does OG&E use herbicides?

A. OG&E uses selective herbicides registered with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and other state and federal agencies and adheres to the application rates specified on the product label. For added safety, we employ only licensed, experienced contractors to do this work. The products used have the same active ingredient as products available to the homeowner at garden centers, except these products are labeled differently for rights-of-way. In general, the products we use have been used by farmers, homeowners and utilities for over 30 years and have demonstrated exceptional environmental and economic benefits.