



Snohomish County
*Planning and Development
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ONLINE INFORMATION

www.snohomishcountywa.gov/1190



This Assistance Bulletin only applies to property within unincorporated Snohomish County and does not apply to property within incorporated city limits.

Hazardous Tree Removal

Assistance Bulletin

#52

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WWW.SNOCO.ORG

Keyword: Assistance Bulletins

Q: What are hazardous trees?

A: “Hazardous tree” as defined by Snohomish County Code 30.91H.040, means a tree which poses an imminent danger of falling on structures, or constitutes an airport hazard.

Hazardous trees are trees with significant structural defects that are likely to lead to failure; increasing the potential to fall or break and causing property damage, injuries, and power outages. These trees may be leaning, or have suffered insect damage or decay, or have a number of other structural problems. Fall and winter windstorms will often bring hazardous trees down abruptly. Inspecting trees for problems, particularly before and after storms, can prevent many potential problems and property damage.

Q: What should I do if there is a hazardous tree near my home or business?

A: If you have a hazardous tree near your property, one of your first considerations is its location. An individual hazardous tree or stand of hazardous trees may be on your property, within a preserved or protected subdivision community tract or Native Growth Protection Area (NGPA) or Critical Area Protection Area (CAPA), on your neighbor’s property or within county right-of-way.

Location of Tree	Steps To Follow
On your property and not in a NGPA or CAPA	You may remove the tree.
On your property, but within a NGPA or CAPA encumbering the property	Follow the recommendations below.
On a subdivision community tract, subdivision open space tract, or subdivision NGPA or CAPA where the tract is owned by all owners of the subdivision	Contact the Homeowners Association (HOA) regarding rules and regulations regarding the removal of the tree. Typically each lot owner within the subdivision has an undivided interest in the tract, with control of the tract regulated by the subdivision HOA. If the area where the tree is located is a NGPA or CAPA the HOA should follow the recommendations below.
On a neighboring adjacent lot and not in a NGPA or CAPA	Contact the neighbor to work out arrangements to remove the tree and follow the instructions below.
On a neighboring adjacent lot and in a NGPA or CAPA	Contact the neighbor to work out arrangements to remove the tree and follow the recommendations below.
On a County Right-of-Way	“Right of way” means all property in which the county has any form of ownership, title or interest and which is held for public road purposes, regardless of whether or not any road exists thereon or whether or not it is used, improved, or maintained for public travel. Please contact Public Works at 425-388-6453 to determine right of way status and to obtain further information regarding the process for tree removal.

This bulletin is intended only as an information guide. The information may not be complete and is subject to change. For complete legal information, refer to Snohomish County Code.

Q: What should I do if there is a tree near my property that looks like it is not structurally sound?

A: If the tree is not presenting an immediate danger to structures on your property, but you suspect that the tree may be diseased or dying and may present future problems, you may contact a certified arborist (tree specialist) for a report on the condition of the tree. Search “Tree Service” or “Certified Arborist” on the internet to find a qualified arborist. The cost of an arborist’s report is the responsibility of the property owner. If the tree is located in a NGPA or CAPA tract, or community tract, don’t forget to also contact the HOA before taking any action to treat or remove the tree.

Q: How do I go about removing trees from a NGPA or CAPA?

A: If a tree is hazardous and must be removed from a NGPA or CAPA designated area, it is necessary to replant to mitigate and restore the ecological benefits formerly provided by the tree. Replanted trees will, over time, provide structural diversity within the NGPA/CAPA and increase the overall species diversity.

To remove and replace trees in a NGPA or CAPA, please follow these steps:

1. The tree should be felled into the NGPA or CAPA whenever possible. It is preferable to leave as much of the tree standing as possible, to provide a standing snag. Special care should be taken not to impact the other live trees within the NGPA or CAPA. This may require the tree to be felled in sections.
2. The stump should be left remaining intact and shall not be removed. The stump will continue to provide soil stability for the root system .
3. No portion of the tree is to be removed for firewood or any other use. The felled tree should be left to decompose and provide organic matter to the soil.
4. Three native trees should be planted to mitigate (off-set) the ecological benefits the removed tree provided, as follows:
 - Choose native species, such as western red cedar, western hemlock, Douglas fir, big-leaf maple, vine maple, beaked hazelnut, Oregon ash, Western crab apple and Pacific dogwood (or consult your local nursery for additional native tree species),
 - Select one- or two-gallon size nursery stock
 - Choose three trees of at least two different species
 - Plant in the general location of the hazardous tree within the NGPA, and
 - Provide supplemental care and monitoring for a few years to ensure survival.

Q: Should I remove and replace trees within NGPA’s or CAPA’s that do not look structurally sound but pose no threat to structures or people?

A: No. Trees that are damaged, dying or knocked over and located within the NGPA/CAPA that pose no threat to structures or present no life/safety issues should not be removed. They should be left as part of the natural ecological system, to eventually decompose and provide organic matter to the soil.

Where can I go for more information?

- The International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) is the world’s leading organization devoted to tree care. They publish a 17- title Tree Care Consumer Information Series that will have information you can use. See their website at <http://www.treesaregood.org/>.
 - ISA’s Pacific Northwest Chapter has a website called Landscape Tree Care 101 where you can learn about a variety of tree care topics: <http://pnwisa.org/tree-care.html>.
 - They also have a bulletin on “How to Recognize and Prevent Tree Hazards” at <http://www.pnwisa.org/HazTree.pdf>.
 - WSU Extension has a publication, “Assessing Tree Health” at <http://extension.wsu.edu/publications/pubs/fs055e/>.
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