



Pre-emptive Pruning: Tree Trimming as a Damage Reduction Measure

Full Mitigation Best Practice Story

State-wide, Florida



Miami, FL - While trimming the tree to display ornaments during the holiday season is a familiar custom to many Americans, tree trimming as a damage reduction measure can protect property during intense rain, winds or hurricanes.

Replacing damaged trees or property damaged by trees can be very costly. High winds or hurricanes can cause tree limbs to break, which can down power lines, or become wind-borne missiles. Sidewalks and gas or water pipes can be fractured when roots tear through the pavement. In 2005, Hurricane Wilma resulted in more than \$1 billion in debris removal charges, an indeterminate, but certainly substantial amount of which was due to fallen trees and tree limbs.

Hurricane Andrew in 1992 downed countless trees in its path. In the Miami Lakes area, however, damage from fallen trees was mild due to the community's previously established tree trimming program.

"There was practically no damage from Hurricane Andrew to the trees that had tree trimming done," said Miami Lakes resident Frank Reddish.

More than the casual observer, Reddish is both a Miami Lakes resident and the Emergency Management Coordinator for Miami-Dade County. As such, he has promoted tree trimming as a damage reduction measure.

"It is an effective measure a community or individual can take," said Reddish. "There's a huge payoff in terms of protecting property."

In Miami-Dade County, the Parks and Recreation Department provides tree trimming classes twice a year. Topics include: proper spacing of trees to prevent interference with power lines; selecting healthy, indigenous trees compatible with the local climate; and correct methods of pruning to prevent exposure of tree trunks to rain and mold. Since its inception in February 2000, more than 1,000 people have attended the class.

Similarly, the Miami-Dade Local Mitigation Strategy Group sponsors the "Hurricane Tree Pruning" class in collaboration with the University of Florida and the Miami-Dade Cooperative Extension Service. Classes are provided twice a year: one targeting tree service professionals and one for homeowners.

While maintenance of trees on private property is generally the responsibility of the homeowner, municipalities, such as the City of Miami, perform routine tree trimming to protect power lines or automobiles from overhanging tree limbs. The city performs tree trimming services on a rotating basis, as well as trimming overhanging tree limbs affecting power lines or road safety as needed.

Utility companies also employ tree trimming. As part of its routine maintenance plans, Florida Power & Light Company clears tree limbs from thousands of miles of power lines every year to keep vegetation from interfering with electrical service. As restoring power is always a priority after a hurricane, proper tree trimming by utility companies can help reduce disruptions caused by damaged trees or tree limbs.

"However, it should be remembered that during severe hurricanes, no amount of prudent tree trimming can prevent trees from uprooting and toppling into power lines or keep tree debris from blowing into power poles or lines," said Steve Anderson, Vegetation Management Specialist with Florida Power & Light Company.

A proactive approach to tree trimming by both private and public sectors contribute to minimizing damage from fallen trees or tree limbs. An interested homeowner or business can check with their local parks and recreation department, roads department or call an arborist to learn about tree trimming education or services available in the area.

Activity/Project Location

Geographical Area: **State-wide**

FEMA Region: **Region IV**

State: **Florida**

Key Activity/Project Information

Sector: **Private**

Hazard Type: **Severe Storm; Hurricane/Tropical Storm**

Activity/Project Type: **Vegetation Management**

Activity/Project Start Date: **01/1991**

Activity/Project End Date: **Ongoing**

Funding Source: **Homeowner; Local Sources**

Activity/Project Economic Analysis

Cost: **Amount Not Available**

Activity/Project Disaster Information

Mitigation Resulted From Federal
Disaster? **Unknown**

Value Tested By Disaster? **Yes**

Tested By Federal Disaster #: **No Federal Disaster specified**

Year First Tested: **1992**

Repetitive Loss Property? **No**

Reference URLs

Reference URL 1: <http://www.miamidade.gov/oem/>

Reference URL 2: <http://www.miamidade.gov/parks/>

Main Points

- Tree trimming as a damage reduction measure can protect property during intense rain, winds or hurricanes.
- In 2005, Hurricane Wilma resulted in more than \$1 billion in debris removal charges, an indeterminate, but certainly substantial amount of which was due to fallen trees and tree limbs.
- In Miami-Dade County, the Parks and Recreation Department provides tree trimming classes twice a year.
- A proactive approach to tree trimming by both private and public sectors contribute to minimizing damage from fallen trees or tree limbs.



Trimmed tree



Trimmed trees