

Introduction

Trees are an essential part of life in North Dakota. In communities, trees provide shade, noise abatement and often increase property values. In rural areas, shelterbelts protect farmsteads, roadways, crops and livestock. The larger the trees, the greater the benefits.

All trees have some level of risk as well. The level of risk for individual trees is extremely variable, based on a number of factors. Sometimes risk is extremely low while other situations may be highly risky.

Tree Risk Assessment

Tree Risk Assessment is a very complex process, taking into consideration a wide variety of factors, both natural and human. Very few people have the appropriate technical training in tree risk assessment. Qualified Tree Risk Assessors use their education, knowledge, training and experience to examine trees, and recommend measures to reduce the risk of living near trees.

NDSU Extension personnel do not have the training to be considered qualified tree risk assessors. Tree risk assessments are beyond the scope of employment of our personnel and an employee that answers questions beyond their scope of employment may put themselves at risk of liability. North Dakota Century Code, Chapter 32-12.2 (<https://www.legis.nd.gov/cencode/t32c12-2.pdf>) defines and discusses liability protection for state employees acting within their scope of employment.

Completing a tree risk assessment may carry some level of liability. Therefore, it is best to leave tree risk assessment to those who have the appropriate training. If a Qualified Tree Risk Assessor is not available, consider contacting an ISA Certified Arborist for assistance in managing tree structure and tree health.

What can the tree owner do?

A number of educational resources are available for tree owners and others who want to learn more about this difficult topic. Begin with the document “Recognizing Tree Risk” (<https://www.treesaregood.org/portals/0/docs/treecare/TreeRisk.pdf>), developed by the International Society of Arboriculture.

Additionally, follow proper tree care practices and maintain tree health. Some general recommendations include:

- Plant the right tree for the site conditions.
- Mitigate poor growing conditions (e.g., those that are too wet or too dry, or perhaps where soil is compacted).
- Prune out deadwood.

Trees can be managed, but they cannot be controlled. To live near trees is to accept some degree of risk. The only way to eliminate all risk associated with trees is to eliminate all trees.

Statement for Agents

NDSU Extension does not evaluate tree risk and cannot offer opinions on tree safety. Only individuals who have earned the ‘Tree Risk Assessment Qualification’ credential from the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) have the training required for a thorough assessment. ISA Certified Arborists are trained in tree care and can provide quality service for the homeowner. Find a Certified Arborist at: <https://www.treesaregood.org/findanarborist>. NDSU Extension can help identify tree health problems caused by insects, diseases, and the site or environment.