

## MDC reminds residents to exercise caution during and after snowstorms

When winter weather hits, heavy snow, ice, and strong winds can take a toll on trees. The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) reminds Missourians to exercise caution when cleaning up after winter storms.

When storms damage trees, clean-up and recovery can seem overwhelming. Some injured trees can be trimmed to maintain their health and value to homeowners. Others should be removed. Knowing what repairs to make, how to make them, and how to avoid paying for unneeded services can help keep injury – both physical and financial – at a minimum.

“Trees are a part of the character of our community and damage to them after a storm can feel traumatic,” said MDC Urban Forester Ann Koenig. “Trees are amazingly resilient, so after a storm, try to be patient.”

Before trimming or removing trees damaged from snow, residents should consider the following advice from MDC:

### **Safety First**

Be aware of utility lines and hazardous overhanging limbs. Alert your electricity provider immediately and allow experts to assess the danger.

Remove trees or limbs that have fallen on your home or are blocking access to your residence. Also, look for any hanging limbs in trees that could drop on your home.

Know your skill level and do not take on more than you can safely accomplish yourself.

“Slippery conditions, brittle, heavy wood, and chainsaws are an extremely dangerous mix for homeowners,” said Koenig. “Leave it to professionals with proper training, experience, and equipment to take care of large trees and any work off the ground.”

### **Be Patient**

Any remaining tree damage can wait until the immediate crisis has passed. As long as there isn't a safety risk, take your time to assess the damage and make decisions on which trees to cut and which ones to save.

If a tree does not present a hazard, take the time to ensure it gets proper care and make a final decision about it in a few weeks or months.

Before beginning any tree work, determine whether your insurance policy covers tree work. Many policies will cover at least part of the cost of tree removal if some structural damage has occurred.

Determine whether damaged trees need pruning or complete removal. If a valuable tree appears to be a borderline case, resist the temptation to simply cut the tree down and be done with it. Remember, time is on your side. After carefully pruning broken branches, give the tree time to recover. Often, new foliage will return the tree to its natural beauty. If not, the decision to remove the tree can always be made later.

### **Hire a Qualified Arborist**

**WARNING: Use caution before hiring people who knock on your door. Good arborists generally are too busy to generate business this way. Door knockers are especially common after a storm and are notorious for recommending unhealthy tree-trimming practices such as “tree topping.”**

“It’s best to go with a qualified arborist,” said Koenig. “Check the yellow pages under ‘Tree Service’ or visit [treesaregood.org/findanarborist](https://treesaregood.org/findanarborist) for an online listing of International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) certified arborists who are local and established in your area.”

Being listed in these directories doesn’t guarantee that companies will do good work, but means that they are locally established and should be easier to track down later if something goes wrong.

Ask for proof of certification and of membership in professional organizations such as ISA.

Ask for proof of worker’s compensation and liability insurance, as well as local references. Good arborists are proud of their work and can provide a list of past clients.

Do not accept “take-it-now” deals. The person offering these deals may pressure you into doing something you will regret later.

Good arborists do not recommend topping. Conscientious arborists also will not use climbing spikes unless the tree is to be removed or someone is hurt. These practices damage trees unnecessarily.

### **Take Heart**

Trees are amazingly resilient and often possess the ability to recover from severe conditions over time.

For more information, contact your local MDC office, or go online to [mdc.mo.gov/resource/tree-care-after-storms](https://mdc.mo.gov/resource/tree-care-after-storms).