City Trees Questions & Answers

Information about City-owned Trees, including Blue Gum Eucalyptus

What guides the City of Newport Beach's decisions and actions relating to City-owned trees?

The City Council has dozens of policies that help guide City staff in various programs and processes. One of those Council Policies is "G-1" – a 17-page policy dating back to 1966 that affirms the City's commitment to its urban forest. The policy includes removal processes, designated street trees for certain areas, "special trees" for certain neighborhoods, the role of the Parks, Beaches, and Recreation Commission, and more.

What is a City-owned tree? How many are there?

City owned-trees are generally those on public land or in the public right-of-way (including medians and parkways). A tree right in front of someone's house in a parkway (the area between the sidewalk and the curb) may be a City-owned tree, or it may be a private tree – it depends on the property lines and the right-of-way lines. Almost all trees in medians are City trees. There are more than 35,000 City-owned trees in Newport Beach.

What does the City's tree maintenance program involve?

As noted, Newport Beach has more than 35,000 street trees in its inventory and operates one of the most extensive street tree programs in Southern California. Newport Beach routinely inspects all trees in its inventory and trims certain trees – such as Coral trees, most Palms, large canopy Eucalyptus, Ficus and other large trees – annually. The City's maintenance program includes:

- Many large trees (see those listed above) are trimmed by a maintenance contractor, West Coast Arborists, approximately once a year. Otherwise, all street trees are on a 3- to 4-year pruning cycle.
- The City's staff arborists routinely inspect all trees.
- Consulting arborists are retained to help the City's staff arborists when an area of specialty is needed or to when an independent analysis is desired.

Why does the City employ staff arborists but also rely on consulting arborists and tree maintenance contractors?

The City has a large inventory of street trees and the community has, historically, expected a high level of service in this area. Trees are important to Newport Beach – from our local environmental interest groups to residents that take great pride in the trees that line their neighborhoods. The current program reflects the City's desire to maintain consistent oversight of the street tree program (in-house arborists) with a fiscal need to provide additional quality service at a reasonable cost (contractors and consultants).

If a tree has insects, even an infestation of insects, is that bad?
Not necessarily. It's not uncommon for trees in our area to have "tortoise beetles." A tortoise beetle infestation harms a tree by reducing its leaves ability to photosynthesize and by exposing the cut leaf surfaces to the elements. None of that, however, leads to tree failure. The infestation is more of a nuisance.

If a tree leans, is that bad?
Not necessarily. Many trees lean. That in itself is not necessarily an indication that the tree is a hazard. A tree can lean and then grow in a manner that "rebalances" itself.

What causes a tree to fail?
There are a number of factors that could cause a tree to fail. Sometimes one factor eventually leads to failure, sometimes it's a combination of factors. A tree could fail due to earthquakes, fungus and decay, weather conditions, overwatering, neglect, improper pruning, improper planting, and more.

Does a fungus cause tree failure?
It can, but not always. Fungus can eventually end the useful life of a tree, but just because a tree is found to have Sulfur Fungus does not mean the tree will fail or that it should be removed. Sulfur Fungus, when it reproduces, puts forth a "conk" or "fruiting bodies" generally near the area of the fungus. A conk could be in mid-trunk or high up on a branch, and that doesn't mean the tree needs to come down. A professional arborist would, however, place that tree on a "watch list." A conk up high – in mid-trunk or on a branch – doesn't mean root fungus. A conk that appears down low by the root structure might indicate root fungus, which also might require removal or placement on a watch list depending on the severity and amount of conks down by the roots.

The Irvine Avenue Tree

The City says that the tree that fell in September 2011 did not show evidence of disease above ground" – what does that mean?
That means that there was no external sign of disease – no fungus, no conks, no lifting of the roots, no visible signs of trouble in the leaves, roots or on the trunk, and the tree was not overwatered. The City could not have predicted the tree would fail.

I read that there was a conk growing on a tree (from the photo it appeared to be in mid-trunk or near branches) near the site of the tree that fell on Irvine Avenue in September. Is that a sign that these trees were diseased?
No, that is an indication that <u>that</u> specific tree had a fungus (causing trunk or branch decay near the site of the conk). We believe the tree in the photo was two or three median islands away (200' to 500' or more) from the tree that fell.

A maintenance record created by the City's tree maintenance contractor, West Coast Arborists, noted the presence of tortoise beetles in some of the trees along Irvine Avenue. Do tortoise beetles cause trees to fail?
No. A tortoise beetle infestation does harm the tree by reducing the photosynthesis and exposing the cut leaf surfaces. That, however, does not lead to tree failure. It is more of a nuisance.

Does the City have any additional statements regarding the Irvine Ave. tree failure?
The fallen tree that resulted in the incident with Ms. Haeyoon Miller did not show evidence of disease above ground. In the wake of the death of Ms. Miller, the City took immediate action to protect the public and performed an inspection of the remaining Blue Gum Eucalyptus trees on Irvine Ave. and in other parts of the city (Holiday Road, Fourth Avenue in Corona del Mar, Castaways Bike Path, 23rd Street, more). Following the inspection of the trees and out of an abundance of caution, the arborists recommended that many of these Blue Gum Eucalyptus trees be removed. The City has been moving forward with the removal of these trees in order to ensure the safety of the public.

How can I find out more?
- Read our G-1 policy (Council Policy Manual)
- Attend a Parks, Beaches, and Recreation Commission hearing (City Calendar)
- Subscribe to the City's Facebook and Twitter feeds
- Contact Mark Harmon, Municipal Operations Department Director, at 949-644-3055.