

Roadside tree safety

Check your roadside trees to make sure they are safe

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Have you ever stopped to think about the trees along your roadside boundaries? What would happen if one of them fell and caused injury or damage? Local authorities are responsible for trees along the roadsides, but not if the trees are on private land.

Trees can fail and cause injury or even death. Deaths associated with falling trees or branches are rare in this country. Excluding incidents involving tree work, approximately one person every two years is killed by a tree. Statistically that's a very low risk so we don't need to take drastic action in terms of pruning or removing roadside trees.

Tree owners do, however, need to take a few simple steps to make sure that their roadside trees are not likely to cause injury or damage. That requirement is set out in the Roads Act of 1993 and there is also a well-established principle of common law that says we may be guilty of negligence if our acts or omissions lead to harm.

If you own a lot of mature roadside trees, consider hiring a professional forester or arborist to inspect them.

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They will advise on any work that needs to be done and advise when the trees should be assessed again. If you are hiring professionals, make sure they have appropriate training, experience and insurance.

In many cases, though, the landowner can do the tree check. Ideally it should be done once a year and simply involves walking the roadside boundaries looking for signs of defects or problems in trees. Be mindful of your own safety and wear hi-vis clothing.

In particular, look for signs of unstable, leaning trees. Also, look for dieback and dead branches, decay and



Deep cracks can suggest a tree is likely to fail.



The recent cracks in the soil around this tree on a bank indicate it has already started to fail.



Fungal bodies are signs of decay and some can indicate an immediate hazard – seek professional advice if in doubt.



cracks extending deeply into wood. Based on that inspection, make a decision as to what work (if any) needs to be done. You may need to hire a tree surgeon.

Tree work is hazardous and chainsaws should only be used by people who have had training and who are



Large cavities in roadside trees are a problem.

using appropriate safety gear. When scheduling the work, deal with the most immediate dangers first.

Keep a record of what trees you checked, and when, what problems you found, what work you determined needed to be done, who did that work and when. This record can form part of your normal farm records and can be handwritten or stored on your computer.

Records will serve as a reminder when it's time to do your next roadside tree check. They will help you to notice if tree problems are progressing and finally, in the event that one of your trees fails and causes harm, they will help prove that you were managing your trees responsibly.

Finally, before carrying out any tree work, check for any legal restrictions, for example wildlife legislation or the need for tree felling licences.