



OSHA REGIONAL INSTRUCTION

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Occupational Safety and Health Administration

DIRECTIVE NUMBER: 2023-05 (CPL 04)

SUBJECT: Regional Emphasis Program for Tree Trimming and Clearing Operations

REGION: III

SIGNATURE DATE: September 25, 2023

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2023

ABSTRACT

- Purpose:** The purpose of this Instruction is to continue a Regional Emphasis Program to reduce workplace fatalities during tree trimming and clearing operations, targeting NAICS codes 561730 (Landscaping Services) and 238910 (Site Preparation Contractors).
- References:** See Paragraph III
- Cancellations:** Philadelphia Regional Notice: CPL 2019-05 (CPL 04), dated October 1, 2018. This Instruction replaces and updates an earlier version.
- Action Offices:** All Federal OSHA Area Offices in Region III
- Originating Office:** Philadelphia Regional Office
- Contact:** Thomas C. Carle, Deputy Regional Administrator
U.S. Department of Labor-OSHA
1835 Market Street
Mailstop OSHA-RO/19
Philadelphia, PA 19103
(215) 861-4900

By and Under the Authority of:

Michael J. Rivera
Regional Administrator

Table of Contents

I.	Purpose	4
II.	Scope	4
III.	References	4
IV.	Expiration Date.....	4
V.	Action.....	4
VI.	Background	5
VII.	Program Procedures	5
VIII.	Compliance Officer Protection.....	6
IX.	Recording in OIS.....	7
X.	Outreach	8
XI.	Evaluation Procedures	8
	Appendix A.....	10

- I. **Purpose** The purpose of this Instruction is to continue a Regional Emphasis Program to reduce the number of fatalities, serious injuries, and serious safety and health hazards while conducting tree trimming activities.
- II. **Scope** This Instruction applies to all Federal Area Offices in Region III.
- III. **References**
1. [CPL 02-01-038](#), Enforcement of the Electrical Power Generation, Transmission and Distribution Standard (June 18, 2003)
 2. [Questions and Answers on 29 CFR 1910.269 and 29 CFR Part 1926, Subpart V](#) (February 2017)
 3. [STD 01-16-007](#), Electrical Safety- Related Work Practices— Inspection Procedures and Interpretation Guidelines, (July 1,1991)
 4. [CPL 02-02-069](#), Enforcement of the Occupational Exposure to Bloodborne Pathogens (November 17, 2001)
 5. [CPL 02-01-022](#), Logging Operations, Inspection Procedures and Interpretive Guidelines Including Twelve Previously Stayed Provisions (September 27, 1996)
 6. [OSHA Memorandum Enforcement Inspection Guidance for Tree Care and Tree Removal Operations](#) (June 24, 2021)
 7. [OSHA’s Industry Profile for Industry Group 078, Landscape and Horticultural Services](#)
 8. [CPL 02-00-051](#), Enforcement Exemptions and Limitations Under the Appropriations Act (February 13, 2023)
 9. [CPL 04-00-002](#), Procedures for the Approval of Local Emphasis Programs (LEPs) (November 13, 2018)
 10. [CPL 02-00-164](#), Field Operations Manual (FOM), (April 14, 2020)
 11. [OSHA Safety and Health Topics – Tree Care Industry](#)
 12. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. [Industry Injury, Illness, and Fatality Data](#)
- IV. **Expiration Date** This Instruction expires September 30, 2028.

- V. **Action** OSHA compliance personnel shall follow the procedures contained in this Instruction when conducting outreach and enforcement activities.

VI. **Background**

The Landscaping Services and Site Preparation, Contractors North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) 561730 and 238910 respectively, have been identified as a focus for reducing the workplace fatality and hospitalization rate related to tree trimming and clearing operations based on statistics from U.S. Department of Labor, OSHA for Fiscal Years (FY) 2018 through FY2022. During this five-year period, OSHA conducted 727 inspections related to a fatality or hospitalization occurring while employees were conducting tree trimming and clearing operations. The majority of the inspections were conducted in the Landscaping Services industry (60%). The Bureau of Labor Statistics data from 2017 through 2021 show that the Landscaping Services industry had greater than 200 fatalities each year, for a total of 1,159 fatalities for those five years. Those fatalities were a result of falls to a lower level (21%), struck by an object or equipment (13%), incidents involving motorized vehicles both on the roadway and not on a roadway (13%), and exposure to electricity (3%).

In Region III alone, there were 75 fatalities inspections between FY2018 and FY2022 related to tree trimming and clearing, with 41 of those fatalities occurring in Federal jurisdictions of Pennsylvania, Delaware, and West Virginia, and 34 fatalities occurring in the state plan jurisdictions of Virginia and Maryland. The three leading causes of these fatalities were listed as struck-by (63%), falls from elevations (13%), electrical shock (11%). These accidents included, but were not limited to: workers being struck by falling trees and limbs; falls from trees, lifts, and ladders; and electrical shock suffered while working in the vicinity of overhead power lines. In Region III during this five-year period, fatal injuries and hospitalizations were disproportionately suffered by workers employed by employers with 10 or less employees with the majority (73%) of the incidents involving an employer with 10 or less employees.

A review of inspections performed by OSHA during FY 2015 through FY 2022 of employers engaged in tree trimming work showed violations related to inadequate personal protective equipment use including fall protection, electrical hazards such as contact with overhead electric lines, improper felling of trees, and improper injury/illness recordkeeping.

This data demonstrates that tree trimming and clearing operations is hazardous work which can result in worker fatalities. These hazards exist whether the work is performed as part of landscaping/horticultural services or site clearing by construction workers. Tree trimming and clearing work

involves several hazards identified in OSHA's focus four (i.e., Falls, Caught-in or Between, Struck-by, and Electrocution). Based on this data, there is a need for Region III to increase its inspections of tree trimming and clearing operations, and to perform outreach to the industries that may perform such work, with the goal of reducing the number of fatal accidents and injuries occurring in these industries.

VII. **Program Procedures**

- A. An inspection targeting system which relies on systematic identification and listing of sites on a random list is not practical. Hazards related to fatalities at such sites are normally transient and of limited duration. The Area Director shall determine, as part of the annual plan, the projected number of inspections to be conducted under this Regional Emphasis Program ("REP") during the fiscal year. Compliance Safety and Health Officers (CSHOs) shall, while traveling during the course of their workday, be watchful for work activities where workers are performing tree trimming/removal operations. Upon seeing such work activity, the CSHO shall immediately notify the Area Office to obtain authorization from the Area Director, Assistant Area Director or designee to initiate an immediate inspection. Approval to start an inspection will normally be granted to the CSHO, provided the activity does not conflict with a higher priority inspection activity.
- B. If the CSHO has no readily available means to contact the Area Office, or is otherwise unable to reach Area Office personnel who can authorize the inspection, the CSHO will initiate an inspection, provided the activity does not interfere with higher priority inspections or assignments. The CSHO shall notify the Area Office management of the inspection as soon as possible.
- C. Whenever an inspection is begun under this REP, the CSHO will include in the case file narrative a description of the circumstances which resulted in discovery of the work activity that was the basis of the inspection. For example, the CSHO would describe the tree trimming activities where a crew was removing a tree at a particular address while in route to the Area Office from a previous inspection. In cases where authorization was not obtained, an explanation shall be included as to the circumstances that prevented communication with the Area Director or designee.
- D. When an employer's NAICS is exempted in the most current revision to Appendix A of [CPL 02-00-051, Enforcement Exemptions and Limitations Under the Appropriations Act](#) at the time of the opening conference, the procedures described in the

Appropriations Act will be followed. For employers with 10 employees or less that are not inspected, the CSHO will provide compliance assistance information and exit the job site.

- E. Health Referrals: Sources of potential health hazards include but are not limited to hazardous noise levels, chemicals, defoliants, and carbon monoxide. CSHOs will be on the lookout for potential health hazards while conducting the inspections of worksites that fall under this REP. A health referral will be submitted through supervisory personnel if the CSHO suspects the presence of potential health hazards.

VIII. Compliance Officer Protection

- A. Prior to conducting the inspection, the Area Director shall ensure the CSHO has the necessary safety and health expertise to evaluate safety and health hazards to which they may potentially be exposed to during their inspections. Compliance Officers should review the OSHA fact sheet for Tree Trimming Safety to familiarize themselves with the common hazards associated with this industry.
- B. The Area Director will also ensure the Compliance Officer has the necessary personal protective equipment (“PPE”) to conduct the inspection, including but not limited to: hard hat, safety glasses, hearing protection, safety footwear and reflective vest.
- C. Prior to initiating the walk around, the Compliance Officer will ask the employer about any unusual hazards or special circumstances that would require specific PPE beyond that addressed in the OSHA fact sheet for Tree Trimming Safety.
- D. CSHOs will not place themselves in potentially hazardous situations or perform any activities which would require them to perform lockout/tagout of equipment. **Under no circumstances is a CSHO to enter the area immediately below active tree trimming activities.** In cases where such conditions are encountered, all necessary information should be sought in other manners, including private employee interviews, witness statements, engineering drawings, manufacturing specifications/manuals, video, photo, etc.

IX. Recording in OIS

Instructions for completing the appropriate inspection classification on the OSHA Information System (OIS) Inspection form (formerly the OSHA 1)

shall be applied when recording inspections conducted under the REP as follows:

- A. Under the OIS Inspection tab: Initiating Type shall be marked as “Programmed Planned”.
- B. Under the OIS Inspection tab: Regional Emphasis Program shall be marked as "TREETRIM".
- C. Compliance Officer referrals are to be recorded as “Programmed Planned” inspections, based on our “line of sight” targeting, as established in this REP. Complaints, referrals from sources such as police departments or fire departments, fatality/catastrophe, and follow-up inspections shall be appropriately recorded as “Unprogrammed Activity” and marked as "TREETRIM" in the Regional Emphasis Program pull down menu.
- D. Upon entry, if it was determined the employees are not exposed to hazards or the employer is an exempted employer, a Compliance Assistance Activity Form is to be completed to account for the time spent on site with the employer and represent the compliance assistance information provided to that employer.

X. **Outreach**

The Regional and Area Offices identified and targeted stakeholders to provide information on this REP and the hazards of tree trimming and clearing operations. Outreach activities were conducted for at least one month prior to the initiation of enforcement activities. An outreach letter was sent to the targeted stakeholders.

Information and outreach materials was provided, as appropriate, during all compliance assistance activities, such as speeches and training sessions where tree trimming and clearing is relevant. The outreach informed stakeholders of the existence, purpose and objectives of this REP, and promoted employer and employee awareness of hazards associated with tree trimming operations. A press release was issued outlining Region III’s REP on tree trimming and clearing and was also be posted on social media. The Regional and Area Offices will continue to look for opportunities to establish partnerships or alliances with associations and organizations in this industry, where appropriate.

XI. **Evaluation Procedures**

The Area Office will submit to the Regional Administrator a written evaluation at the midpoint (30 months) and completion (60 months) of this LEP in the format specified by OSHA Instruction [CPL 04-00-002](#)

Procedures for the Approval of Local Emphasis Programs (LEPs)
(11/13/18).

Appendix A

Dear Employer:

The purpose of this letter is to inform you that your industry is the focus of an initiative by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to reduce exposures to hazards from tree trimming and clearing, and to invite you to take advantage of resources available to employers in addressing these health and safety hazards.

This letter has been sent to establishments in the state of [STATE] similar to yours who potentially perform tree trimming and clearing work.

Based on a review of fatality investigation data in OSHA's Region III (Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, West Virginia, and Virginia), there were 75 fatalities occurring in this region over the past five year period related to tree trimming and clearing. The four leading causes of these fatalities were listed as struck-by, falls from elevations, electrical shock, and caught-in. These accidents involved workers being struck by falling trees and limbs in addition to motorized equipment; falls from trees, lifts, and ladders; caught in chippers; and electrical shock while working in the vicinity of overhead power lines. Fatal injuries and hospitalizations were disproportionately suffered by workers in companies of 10 or less with the 73% of the incidents during the previous five-year period involving an employer with 10 or less employees.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, injury and illness rates in this industry are also higher than in other industry sectors, and include sprains and sprains from manual handling of tools and materials, electrical hazards from working in close proximity to power lines, falls from bucket trucks and trees, struck-by from working around motor vehicles and falling trees/limbs, and heat stress from extended periods of time outdoors.

As a result, OSHA will begin conducting inspections of employers performing tree trimming and clearing work under this initiative on or about [DATE]. While receipt of this letter does not guarantee that your company will be inspected by OSHA, the initiative does increase the probability that it could occur. To prepare for an inspection, and to protect employees from hazards associated with tree trimming and clearing, it is important that you have an effective safety and health program in place.

You are eligible for assistance from the [STATE] Occupational Safety & Health Consultation Program. This program is administered through [AGENCY] and is operated separately from OSHA's enforcement program. The service is free and confidential, and there are no citations or proposed penalties. Designed primarily for smaller employers, the consultation program can help you identify hazards in your workplace and find effective and economical solutions for eliminating or controlling them. A OSHA consultant can assist you in developing and implementing an effective safety and health management system for your workplace. You can reach the consultation program at [NUMBER].

Another source of useful information is OSHA's Web site resources for the tree care industry at <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/treecare/index.html>

We hope you will take this opportunity to develop or improve your health and safety program so that hazards related to tree trimming and clearing work can be reduced or eliminated at your job sites. If you have questions or concerns or about OSHA's tree trimming and clearing initiative, contact this office at [NUMBER].

Sincerely,

[NAME]
Area Director