



Spring Into Action: Tips To Tackle Falling Tree Hazards This Spring

Spring is a crucial time for councils and communities to assess tree health and undertake essential maintenance to mitigate risks posed by decaying branches or weak roots. The risks of not doing so can be costly — not financially, but potentially even in terms of lives.

On 8 November 2024, Cheshire East Council was fined £500,000 and ordered to pay £7,284 in costs following the death of a Wilmslow man struck by a falling tree limb, which inflicted multiple fatal injuries at the scene¹.

A similar accident occurred in December 2024 in Telford and Wrekin, Shropshire, where Storm Darragh uprooted 90 trees, causing one death as well as several cases of injury and property damage². Some of the victims evaded grave injuries but were left highly traumatised. Such accidents are widespread during storms, often resulting in substantial financial losses for property owners or local authorities and potentially turning into expensive lawsuits.

Why is managing trees essential?

The hidden dangers of falling trees:

Personal injury or fatalities: A falling tree or branch can cause life-threatening injuries to pedestrians or drivers.

Damage to property: When a tree comes down, homes, cars and fences can take a heavy blow, often leading to expensive repairs.

Disruption of vital services: A tree hitting power or water lines can cause widespread service outages and interruptions.

Blocking the way: Fallen trees can create obstructions, slow traffic or block emergency access, putting lives at risk.

Fire risks: A tree falling on power lines can spark fires, threatening homes, forests and wider communities.

How can the risk of falling trees be minimised?

Regular and thorough inspections by qualified professionals can detect potential hazards like tree decay, disease or structural vulnerabilities that may pose a threat to public safety or property.

¹"Council Fined Half a Million After Man Is Killed by Falling Tree," *Peninsula*, 14 Nov 2024.

²"Almost 90 Trees Down as Storm Darragh Batters Borough". *Telford & Wrekin Council*, 08 Dec 2024.

Some additional ways to keep trees safe are:

Professional arborist consultations:

Hire certified arborists to assess and maintain trees, ensuring proper care and intervention when necessary.

Pruning and trimming: Regularly prune dead or overgrown branches to prevent them from becoming hazardous in storms or strong winds.

Tree removal: Remove trees that pose significant risks due to advanced age, disease or structural instability, especially in high-risk areas.

Root system monitoring: Ensure trees have healthy root systems and address root-related issues that could lead to tree instability.

Aged trees and pest infestation: Examine aged trees as they are more susceptible to pest infestations, which can speed up deterioration and heighten the risk of structural failure.

Proper planting practices: When planting new trees, ensure they are in the right environment with sufficient space and soil to grow strong and healthy.

Prompt emergency response: Establish an emergency response plan ahead of time to ensure there is a clear and organised approach to addressing fallen tree blockages or damage, especially on public roads and utility lines.

Clear pathways: Ensure that trees are not overhanging critical pathways, such as walkways or emergency routes, which could obstruct movement in case of a fall.

Weather considerations: Regularly monitor weather forecasts and take pre-emptive action such as securing loose structures or temporarily closing high-risk areas when storms or extreme conditions are expected.

Community awareness: Educate the community about the importance of reporting dangerous trees or limbs and encourage them to alert local authorities when necessary.

Local councils often engage tree surgeons in tree management to mitigate potential hazards that can cause serious injuries to people and property. To support these campaigns further, having a Professional Indemnity insurance plan in place can help protect tree surgeons or the council employing them from any claims arising from damages or injuries caused to the public during the tree management operation.

Advanced tree management

Progress is being seen in advanced techniques like resistance drilling, which can detect hidden decay within a tree's structure, while drone inspections can provide an efficient, high-resolution view of a tree's crown and overall condition, allowing arborists to assess stability without climbing.

