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**The Clod-Hopper**

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Club Website:  
[www.gardenersofwakecounty.org](http://www.gardenersofwakecounty.org)

**VEGETATION MANAGEMENT FOR POWER LINES**

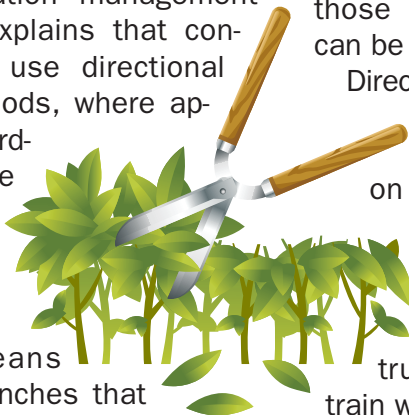
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7.5 feet on each side of the centerline.

<https://www.duke-energy.com/safety/right-of-way-Management/pec-vegetation-management.asp>

**Duke Energy advertises good pruning techniques (where applicable):**

The vegetation management website explains that contractors will use directional pruning methods, where applicable. According to Mike Kuhns at Utah State University, directional pruning means that only branches that head toward the utility lines (or other obstructions) are pruned. Those that are growing down or out away from the wires are left alone to continue their growth. Also, no stubs are left since branches are always pruned at the point where they reach another branch or at a "crotch". Such pruning cuts heal well and minimize sprouting and decay when properly made.



Trees that are directionally pruned will not have the familiar hedged look of a topped tree. Instead, they will have a V-shape if lines are directly overhead or an L-shape if lines are to one side. Though this may appear to create an unbalanced or weak crown, the tree will grow to correct any lack of balance and will end up healthier than if it had been topped.

Directional pruning has many advantages over topping. First, it

leaves a tree that is nearly as healthy as before it was pruned. Trees do not need to be pruned as often since there are fewer sprouts and the branches that remain are growing away from the wires. This saves money and reduces utility bills. Fewer wounds are created on the tree and wounds that are made heal much better. Directional pruning can also be started when a tree is young. As a tree's crown grows, branches that are pointed away from the lines can be kept while those pointed toward the lines can be removed.

Directional pruning works best if started when a tree is young and may not work on trees that have been topped many times. Such trees often are too rotten and poorly formed to benefit. Central leaders or trunks are more difficult to train with this method."

<http://forestry.usu.edu/html/city-and-town/tree-care/directional-pruning-and-powerlines>

**Duke Energy (and its contractors) have a concerning history:**

Residents of Greensboro NC became organized after Duke Energy contractors in 2012 implemented excessive trimming in a way that was perceived as hazardous, and unrelated to the health and appearance of the tree canopy. The outrage was strong enough to motivate the city to issue a new ordinance regulating vegetation management. The ordinance included the following specifications:

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## VEGETATION MANAGEMENT FOR POWER LINES

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- Make Duke Contractors clean up by removing all “large debris” trunks and branches from private property.
- Require more frequent trimming (4-5 years) so that less cutting is needed per visit.
- Impose the same flexible guidelines citywide on how close trees can get to power lines, just like those used in older neighborhoods.
- Allow both the property owner and utility company to appeal the decision of the city’s urban forester to the commission.

These provisions were struck down by the Utilities Commission as counter to state law. Subsequently, Duke Energy implemented substantial tree removal at a historic home and garden in Greensboro, even after the homeowners had paid an arborist to carefully cut the trees and protect wires.

<http://triad-city-beat.com/duke-tree-cuts-in-westerwood-infuriate-residents/>

This summer, contractors cut down a 100-year-old oak in Raleigh without notifying the owner, and despite the fact that it was far from a power line. The company representative says that the tree was a hazard for falling towards a line.

<http://abc11.com/news/familys-100-year-old-oak-cut-down-by-power-company-/889572/>



Currently, in Raleigh, John Kane Jr. has gone to court to protect a willow on his property from removal by Duke Energy. He contends that a 44-foot willow tree is a fixture of his yard and he is willing to pay to have it trimmed to protect nearby power lines. Duke Energy wants to cut it down, along with a 57-foot tall dawn redwood on the property. Duke Energy took him to court in order to force the trees to be removed, rather than trimmed.

<http://www.wral.com/raleigh-man-duke-energy-face-off-over-front-yard-tree/14677777/>

### Are changes coming to Wake County and Raleigh?

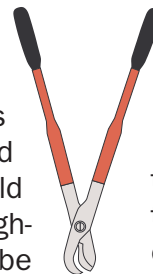
It does appear that vegetation management in Raleigh will be implemented more aggressively than was done in the past by Progress Energy. That isn’t necessarily a bad thing, but it could be. In order to learn more I called Hector Corletto whose number was on the door hangers. He works with the crew that is doing the work. I asked him if they were really cutting our trees in Five Points clear to a radius of 15 feet around all of the wires. He said yes. I pointed out that this was a pretty big change from what has been done in the past and that there are a lot of old historic trees in this neighborhood that would be substantially affected. He confirmed that this round of cutting would be different and he expected concern from residents. I followed up with Ian, who coordinates the cutting and is clearly



more adept at public relations. Ian reassured me that nothing is really changing; this is only necessary, routine maintenance. But specific examples told a different story. We walked the neighborhood and I asked about trees that had clearly not been cut back in the past. For example, at 1701 Fairview there is a 50-year-old pink magnolia that has never been cut. It needs to be trimmed, but it is also slow growing. 15 feet would remove more than half the tree. I asked about it specifically. He said Progress Energy made a lot of exceptions, and they can’t do that anymore. He said that it isn’t safe to allow trees to grow into the wires. No doubt it isn’t. But... it is safe to cut City of Raleigh trees back to only 7.5 feet. That would make a big difference in a neighborhood with small lots and old trees like ours.

### Can we help?

It is easy for me to be a tree hugger. You might remember how my first *Clodhopper* article was about dogwoods, and I recently wrote about bald cypress at Pullen Park and the Rose Garden. However, opposing interests have to be balanced in this case. Research suggests that there is a lot that Duke Energy can do to mitigate the impact of tree trimming, and they don’t always do it. They employ contractors to implement the work, and some contractors do a better job than others. Directional trimming is very important to the overall appearance, health of the tree and long term growth. Directional trimming means that they don’t *have* to cut 15 feet in every direction from the wire, but only branches heading towards the



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Change Service Requested

## **VEGETATION MANAGEMENT FOR POWER LINES**

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wire. They can also take into account the type of tree, growth pattern and growth rate. Directional trimming takes judgement and care. That takes time and money (at least in the short run). Contractors in Greensboro didn't take that time. They are more likely to take that time if they know people care. Asking questions is a good way to demonstrate caring. We can ask questions from any of these people:

**Ian: (910) 544-9312.** Ian coordinates the work that is being conducted in Raleigh. He is very nice and can explain policies and reasons. He is organizing trimming

all across Raleigh, but the Five Points neighborhood is an immediate example.

**Hector: (910) 995-9503.** Hector is the foreman of multiple crews that are actually doing the work. He is very nice and can handle scheduling for anyone that is having work done. He is overseeing trimming all across Raleigh, but the Five Points neighborhood is an immediate example.

**Zach Manor: (919) 996-4868.** Zach is the City of Raleigh Urban Forester. He can help with questions regarding city trees, though his jurisdiction does not cover private property.

**Duke Energy Customer Service: (800) 452-2777.** I never got anywhere here, but they can apparently connect you to a vegetation

management specialist or right-of-way professional.

Here are some questions that still aren't answered: Why do the city trees need only 7.5 feet of clearance but trees on private property need 15 feet? Are you going to employ directional trimming techniques in this next round of trimming? Are you going to cut limbs that are not growing in the direction of the wires? How are you going to take into consideration slow growing trees? What are some examples of trees that are slow growing and don't need to be cut back so far? If they are slow growing, how far will they be cut back? Are the same standards going to be applied to historic trees? What trees count as historic? Why was Progress Energy able to make exceptions that are no longer possible?

