

# Managing vegetation around transmission lines

*Focus is on public safety and keeping the lights on*

To help ensure public safety and the safe and reliable operation of the electric transmission system, DATC will remove incompatible vegetation from power line rights-of-way. Tall-growing trees and other incompatible vegetation can be hazardous to public and worker safety. They also can threaten electric service reliability and risk damage to the electric system. Dense, woody vegetation also can impede access to poles and structures for crews to inspect, maintain and repair lines.

## Vegetation management practices guided by industry standards

Power outages that occur on high-voltage power lines are much more serious than those that occur on lower voltage distribution lines because many thousands of homes and businesses can be impacted. Equally important are the hazards associated with the risk of arcing and fires when power lines and trees are in close proximity.

Between 1996 and 2003, the number and serious nature of transmission grid failures increased as a result of vegetation contacts with high-voltage power lines. The 2003 East Coast widespread outage affected 50 million people in the eastern U.S. and Canada for extended periods of time. The federal government responded by developing mandatory reliability standards requiring transmission utilities to establish vegetation management programs with the goal of preventing outages caused by trees and vegetation. DATC has a program that accomplishes this goal by using practices that align with easements rights and industry standards.

## Focus on public safety, electric reliability

DATC's vegetation management program helps ensure that adequate clearances between power lines, trees and other vegetation are maintained at all times.

It was common practice in the past for utilities to allow certain trees and vegetation to remain, or to use trimming and pruning to help manage clearance requirements. This practice has proven to be risky, inefficient and ineffective in preventing outages, fires and other hazardous conditions. To avoid these issues, DATC will remove, rather than trim, to achieve the necessary clearances and minimize risk.

DATC's program takes into account tree and vegetation growth rates, line sagging and blowing, maintenance cycles, extreme weather conditions, and the potential for arcing electricity—a dangerous situation that occurs when electricity “jumps” from the wires to another source that can conduct electricity. When all of these factors are combined, the safe clearances between trees and power lines are larger than past practices or than many property owners may believe necessary.



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## Working with landowners

An easement is a permanent interest in real property that gives DATC the legal right to use the property for the specific purpose of constructing, operating and maintaining a power line facility. The property within the easement is often referred to as the power line right-of-way. The easement limits the use of the right-of-way and allows for the removal of trees, vegetation and other obstacles that could interfere with the operation of the power line.

DATC will notify landowners in advance to make them aware that right-of-way maintenance is scheduled in their area. This notification, which may be in the form of a personal visit by one of DATC's forestry contractors, describes the plans, the reason for the work, the trees and vegetation that will be removed or trimmed, and the time frame. DATC also will use mail and correspondence in advance of the contractor visit to notify landowners of scheduled work. By discussing plans with property owners, trees or vegetation that may be eligible for relocation by the property owner can be evaluated and other landowner concerns can be addressed. Compensation is not offered for relocation or maintenance work. In emergency situations, it is not always possible to alert property owners that crews will be on site.

## Removing woody vegetation is the prudent approach

A power line right-of-way, or easement area, typically includes the area directly beneath the wires (wire zone) and the area outside the wire zone to the edge of the right-of-way (border zone). In most situations, landowners should expect that all trees and dense woody vegetation will be removed from the easement during line construction and forestry maintenance work. Occasionally small shrubs may be allowed to remain in the border zone. Crews may also remove dead, dying, diseased or leaning trees or branches outside of the easement area if they threaten the safe and reliable operation of the power line.

With landowner consent, vegetation that is likely to re-sprout after cutting may be chemically treated to inhibit further re-growth, lessening the need for extensive clearing and mowing in the future. Native grasses are generally not affected by this application of herbicides, which is conducted by qualified applicators using Environmental Protection Agency-registered herbicides.

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