

3-22-13 Opportunities and Risks of Tree Work

Storms bring opportunities. What looks like a path of destruction is the land of income opportunities for anyone with a chain saw and a truck. There's plenty of work for the enterprising person, including young ones, willing to rake, gather sticks and branches and haul to a burning spot or, in some towns, place at the edge of the road for chipping. Have you noticed, though, that we don't often see young people doing this anymore? It used to be common practice for young people to rake and shovel and mow lawns. They were eager to earn that extra cash. The need is certainly still there; both in work to be done and by people needing assistance.

Sandy, Nemo and No Name storms created more than a need this winter. They created a necessity! The streets are lined with huge tree trunks. The wetlands are filled with tipped over trees, displaying their shallow but wide root system, now exposed for all to see their attempt at avoiding wet toes. Homeowners are working at cutting up and removing trees too large for brush burning.

Many of these trees are so large that an ordinary chain saw isn't enough and even when it is, what to do with all those logs and what about the stump? The professional tree removal companies are busy, busy, busy. Many of them have large trucks, some with buckets, huge chippers, and stump grinders. I have great respect for these people who do this right, for this is dangerous work. It requires more than some equipment. It requires experience, knowledge and good sense. Get references and make sure they are insured before you decide to go with the low bid.

What's the point of insurance? It isn't only people at risk of injury. When that equipment enters your property, they need to be aware of utilities and they need to know where your septic system is. They need to know where all components of the system are. If you only know where the tank is from when you get it pumped; that is not enough information. Septic systems usually have a tank, a distribution box and a leaching area. Your septic system is one of the most expensive investments of home ownership. It might be below ground and out of sight but it is worth protecting.

There are not only the economic concerns to contend with, but also the potential dangers inherent with driving over an older system, particular, a cesspool. Cesspools can be very deep, often built only by stacking blocks or stones. If heavy equipment were to damage the cover, they can collapse, creating a void ready to swallow whatever follows.

Several years ago, I saw one of those collapsed cesspools after stump grinding equipment backed over it. The driver escaped but the home owner was left with an emergency needing rectifying. It was the fastest perc test, design and installation ever!

The homeowner wasn't expecting this, that day she looked out her kitchen window as the stump grinder rolled off the truck and backed up in her yard. She was there the day before when

the large tree was cut down. At that time, the tree cutter asked her about the location of her septic system. The woman pointed to the location of the cesspool, for that's all there was. The tree cutter was careful to avoid it with his truck. The woman assumed that he had passed this knowledge on to his crew when they returned to grind down the stump in place. That was an understandable assumption. It was not well founded, though. Minutes later, she had a very dangerous hole in her yard and faced a very expensive project with an up-to-code, engineered system. No one was injured but bank accounts suffered and the two parties had some choice words about who was responsible for what. They worked out an agreement, with the tree removal company chipping in, in a different sort of way than usual requiring money rather than machines!

If you or anyone you know is having tree removal work done, please visit your local board of health office to see if they have information on the septic system. Get a copy and show it to anyone bringing in heavy equipment. We have drawings for most of the systems, but if it is old, we might not. In that case, it would be worth having a Title V inspector help you to locate the system, if there is any chance of trucks having to be near it. Please don't take that chance.

Be safe, have fun raking and brush burning, cook some hotdogs, toast some marshmallows and know what's where in your yard. And while you're at it, be looking for some good hiding spots for Easter eggs!

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