

Southwest TN EMC Tree Trimming

Trees are important for many reasons. They offer protection from the summer sun and the winter wind. They provide habitat for many species of animals and give children a place to play.

However, trees and utility lines do not mix.

Vegetation management is an important aspect of Southwest TN EMC's goal of providing our members with safe, reliable, and affordable energy.

STEMC maintains a comprehensive vegetation management program for three reasons.

Safety

Trees near power lines pose a threat to your home, your electric service, and your health. When trees contact high voltage lines and the right conditions are present, they may become conductors, carrying deadly electricity within the reach of your family and pets.

System Reliability

Seven of every ten power outages on STEMC's system are the result of trees and other vegetation coming in contact with our lines. These outages are costly and inconvenient. And because our distribution lines are only a part of a larger system, the tree in your yard may create problems for hundreds or even thousands of people.

Economic Responsibility

Aside from safety and system reliability, STEMC has a financial responsibility to our members to weigh the financial impact of our vegetation management program. The return on the money we spend to control vegetation is significant. Our trimming and spraying programs help control line-loss and outage management expenses. These savings translate into lower rates for our members.

Vegetation Management Program

Southwest Tennessee Electric maintains a comprehensive vegetation management program to control growth in proximity of STEMC lines and equipment. Our tree trimmers will be in your area once every 5 years to maintain clearance. National Electric Safety Code (NESC) and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations require electric utilities to clear vegetation from power lines as a safety measure for our members and our employees. Right-of-Way Maintenance crews are supervised by Foresters who follow the guidelines of experts from the International Society of Arboriculture and the National Arbor Day Foundation. Their work may include pruning or removing trees or removing brush.

Pruning Trees

When trees are pruned, the goal is to remove the tree from the proximity of the line while taking steps to ensure the future health of the tree. This typically involves side pruning, or trimming the branches growing toward the lines on one side of the tree.

Removing Trees

As a last resort, trees may be removed when that is the only way to leave a property with healthy,

viable vegetation. On manicured properties, stump grinding and tree replacement may be available in certain circumstances.

Removing Brush

STEMC right-of-way contract crews utilize herbicides to control the growth of brush below lines. Special care is taken to select EPA approved herbicides. The herbicides remove woody-stemmed vegetation allowing natural grasses to flourish, and are less toxic to humans and pets than table salt.

Please view our map of scheduled maintenance from our Tree Trimming page to get information about your area:

Your Utility Foresters:

Atoka & Covington



John Maxwell
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Brownsville



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Chris Hunt
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Frequently Asked Questions

Will you contact me before trimming?

STEMC makes every effort to contact landowners before we come. A notice in the form of a post card will be mailed to the same address we are sending your bill to. The cooperative's line clearance contractors will give a courtesy knock when arriving to work on residential property.

Is permission of the property owner necessary before doing tree work?

STEMC's easements, recorded or prescriptive, grant the cooperative authority to trim trees without property-owner permission to provide for a safe and reliable electric system. However, the cooperative respects the property of its members and, as mentioned above, will attempt to notify the property owner of the need for tree work before trimming is done. In unusual or emergency situations, it may be necessary to trim trees without first notifying the property owner in order to restore service or eliminate safety hazards. STEMC recommends the removal of trees that will require extensive trimming on a regular basis.

Why do you need so much clearance?

STEMC operates and maintains over 3,800 miles of line to serve nearly 50,000 meters. Without

sufficient clearance, outages and blinks would increase and frequency of trimming would also increase. Your quality of service would suffer and maintenance cost would rise. STEMC's contracted line clearance tree trimmers follow guidelines of experts from the International Society of Arboriculture and the Arbor Day Foundation. The cooperative's line clearance specifications were developed to accommodate a five year trimming cycle for the trees indigenous to our area. In order to redirect the future growth of the tree so it will have plenty of room to move with natural wind sway and regrowth for the next five years, trees are trimmed back to a suitable lateral branch that is growing in a safe direction. If a proper lateral is not present, the next best pruning point is at the branch bark collar on the base of the tree.

Other than some of the reasons mentioned above and other more obvious reasons, such as preventive reduction in outages, limbs touching and burning on electric lines is one of the principal wastes of electricity. Also, with lines clear from trees, the linemen have the necessary room to operate and restore power more quickly by not having to manipulate downed power lines from around and out of trees. The cooperative cannot storm-proof the lines but the fewer threats there are to overhead conductors; the sooner we can restore power after damage causing storms.

Do you use herbicides as part of your right-of-way maintenance program?

Yes. STEMC's contracted herbicide applicators will treat the utility rights of ways every other year. If vegetation is small, some areas can be controlled through use of herbicides without first clearing, reducing the overall cost of maintenance. All herbicides used are approved for utility right-of-way use and are very safe, and the cooperative's contracted herbicide applicators have the appropriate Tennessee licenses.

How close to the power lines can I plant trees?

That varies with variety. Please view "Illustrated Examples of Clearing" on our Tree Trimming page. At mature height there should still be 15' clearance from primary power lines and 6' clearance from low voltage service lines. Please plant as far away as possible and never plant under the line.

Can I plant trees or shrubs next to pad mount transformers or meter pedestals?

Keep in mind there are buried electric lines around these devices. First call TN ONE CALL, 1-800-351-1111 or 811 to get underground lines marked. For your safety, please do not dig within 5' of marked lines and plant no closer than 10' from any device.

If I have a yard tree under the line, what options do I have?

Professional arborists strongly discourage topping or shaping trees. Removing more than 25% of a tree's canopy at one time results in unsightly sucker growth and is detrimental to its health. Other than trimming, the cooperative offers a tree replacement program, as described earlier. In certain circumstances, if you allow the cooperative to remove the tree, you will be provided with a "power line friendly tree" to plant in a safe location. Contact us for details.

How does Southwest TN EMC know when a tree needs to be trimmed or removed?

The following priority will be followed in determining when and where tree trimming will be done:

1. Reports of electrical outages caused by trees.
2. Areas where trees have been damaged by storms.
3. During the regular tree-trimming cycle.
4. Reports from customers indicating potential tree/power-line problems.

Can a private property owner or commercial tree-trimmer obtain help in trimming or removing trees near electric wires?

STEMC will assist property owners and/or their commercial contractors, at their request, with the trimming and removal of trees that are near the cooperative's wires. Please call your local office to make an appointment. A representative of STEMC will make an inspection and explain to the property owner or contractor what we can do to assist. The cooperative's assistance may include one or both of the following activities:

- The temporary removal of electric wires that may be hazardous to workers. The cooperative will coordinate with the property owner or contractor the time the work can be done.
- The trimming of the tree so that it can be safely removed or trimmed by the property owner or contractor. All wood will be left on the property owner's premises. STEMC is not responsible for cutting wood to size or piling brush.

How does Southwest TN EMC determine how far we trim trees from our lines?

The linemen and line clearance tree trimmers are presented with enough danger performing their everyday routines and duties alone without forcing them to work within the "minimum approach" zone of the conductors. Enough clearance is maintained for the cooperative's linemen and contracted personnel to safely work on the electrical facilities and clear vegetation nearby with minimal risk of injury or creating power outages. When Southwest TN EMC performs line clearance tree trimming on residential property, the crews are instructed to clear lines to a minimum of 15', ground to sky, from our primary lines and 6' radius from service lines. Tree crews will trim back as far as 20'-25', ground to sky, in non-residential, off road areas that are difficult to access. This will effectively produce a five-year trimming cycle. Depending on the situation, the cooperative might trim beyond normal distances to leave trees as healthy as possible. For example, if a pine limb were trimmed back beyond any green foliage, or needles, but not all the way to the base of the tree, the limb would die. In time, the cooperative may get members calling back requesting a crew back to cut the limb all the way over to the base. This is expensive and time consuming, especially when energy could be focused on additional tree trimming.

What do I do if I have a danger tree near the power lines or a limb is on the line?

Please call your local STEMC office and someone will be sent out to look over the tree. The cooperative will work with you to determine the safe and correct course of action. Never attempt to trim or remove a tree near our lines! Please view pictures of "Conductors and Hardware" on our Tree Trimming page.

Why don't you put all the lines underground?

When building a new residence or subdivision, providing underground utilities is aesthetically pleasing and cost efficient. On the other hand, converting overhead conductors to underground

is rather expensive and more difficult to troubleshoot outages. When lines are in the air, the linemen can see the problems. When lines are buried they must dig to locate problems.

Will you clean up trees broken and cleared due to storms and power outages?

STEMC does not clean up debris created during power restoration. The cooperative clears trees that are causing outages and moves on to the next location to restore power.

Will my tree look ugly after you trim it? Will you trim the other side to balance it out?

Your tree will look like it has been trimmed for line clearance. Some trees will receive more maintenance than others due to their species or proximity to conductors. It will gradually flush back out and look better over the next few growing seasons and with each consecutive trimming cycle, using directional pruning methods, the tree will need less maintenance. The cooperative will trim the tree back to a safe distance for you to perform any additional maintenance, if you desire. Line clearance tree trimming is a time-sensitive job and it's in everyone's best interest that trimming crews continue to "get down the line" to ensure they have visited every tree that may threaten the integrity of your power system.

Southwest Tennessee EMC's Distribution Line Clearance Guidelines can be viewed from our Tree Trimming page.