

Death by a Thousand Chops

Written by Jeff Shimonski, BT Contributor
January 2020

Tell these businesses to practice what they preach



Last month we heard from local news media that a woman had been killed by a falling tree branch in Boca Raton. This is really unfortunate. Now I'm not involved in this incident, and I've only seen photos of the tree from news reports, but I would venture that previous maintenance and pruning practices might have been a culprit in the failure on what appears to be a *Calophyllum* species, a very durable tree species.

This month I planned to feature the large dead tree I wrote about in July ("Dead Trees Are Everywhere") that was in front of the Miami-Dade County School Board Administration Building in downtown Miami. To my amazement the last time I passed by, a week ago as I write this, the dead tree is still there. I took a photo of it and was going to put it in this article. It's not even fenced off so people can still stand or walk underneath it.

Instead of the large dead tree photo, check out the photo I did use. Recently I stopped to shop at one of our big-box stores and, while walking through the parking lot, passed a tree that had all of its root collar chopped off. The root collar on a tree is that section of trunk that flares out a bit just before the ground. This is normally where the largest structural roots begin their attachment to the tree, and on larger trees the flare is more obvious.

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I couldn't believe my eyes. There are a number of large mature trees in this parking lot, so I checked some to see if they'd received the same treatment, and they had! Most of the large supporting roots of these trees had been removed.

What were they thinking!

With these large roots severed, the tree's vascular system had been cut and was now unable to transport water and nutrients to the canopy foliage. Cuts and damage like this are appropriately called an "infection court." This means the tree's natural defenses have been removed, and now pathogens, insects, and disease organisms have an easy point of entry.

These trees may never be able to defend against the decay that will now attack their open wounds, unless, of course, they blow over in high winds first.

This severe damage was deliberately done to trees in the parking lot of a large successful multinational company that gushes on its website about "constantly improving the sustainability of our products and operations." Yet it just placed its customers and employees in a potentially dangerous situation.

Who approved this butchering? Why was it done? I hope their legal team and insurance carrier are alerted. It's a shame.

It was nice to have a parking lot with nice large trees to park underneath. The car was nice and cool inside when I'd come back. Now the parking lot will turn into an oven without those trees to provide shade.

A while back, I was hired to evaluate trees on the property of another large multinational company, a bank. The property manager told me that branches were "falling out of the trees and almost hitting customers." These trees were near the bank's 24-hour ATM. When I evaluated the trees, I rated them all to be in poor condition and recommended their immediate

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removal. I recommended placing a pedestrian barrier around the trees until they could be removed. I called the property manager while I was still onsite to tell him about the severity of the tree issue, the substantial amount of dead branches in the trees, and what I was about to write in the report that I eventually sent to his staff.

Well guess what? The trees are still there.

I could tell you about the very large multinational company that just butchered dozens of mature live oak trees on its property, even as its website touts that its “biodiversity efforts support the unique balance of plants, animals, and ecosystems.”

Really? In the meantime, your illegal tree pruning and tree-removal efforts substantially raised the temperature at grade, and the remaining trees are going into a rapid decline and will fail. So much for slick marketing and advertising.

What’s going on here? There are tree-pruning and landscape maintenance standards to follow. Every business with a landscape and trees to maintain should make sure the work to be done is correctly specified, performed as clearly stated in the contract, and done in a proper manner by individuals qualified to carry out the work. Decisions for work performed on a property should be vetted by competent staff and reviewed by the company risk managers. Right?

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