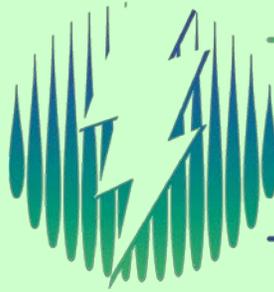


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**SOUTHWESTERN  
POWER  
ADMINISTRATION**

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## Vegetation Management Program - Frequently Asked Questions

### **Question. Why does Southwestern have to keep its transmission corridor clear of trees?**

**Answer.** Southwestern's vegetation management goals are to promote safety, provide for maintenance access, and ensure electric system reliability. Trees or other vegetation near a transmission line can conduct electricity and increase the chance of unintentional contact with people and pets. If electricity flows through a tree to the ground, that tree essentially becomes "electrified," and anyone touching that tree could sustain serious injury, even death, as electricity seeks a path to ground.

Additionally, as the operator of nearly 1,400 miles of high-voltage transmission lines, Southwestern has the obligation to keep our rights-of-way clear so that we can continue providing reliable wholesale power – power that ultimately serves millions of people in homes, businesses, hospitals, emergency response centers, water treatment plants, and other facilities.

### **Question. It seems like Southwestern has been clearing the right-of-way more than usual lately. Has there been a change in the law?**

**Answer.** Yes. In June 2007, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) approved the North American Electric Reliability Corporation's (NERC) standard FAC-003-1, "Transmission Vegetation Management Program," which directed utilities to prevent outages from vegetation located on transmission rights-of-way and minimize outages from vegetation located adjacent to rights-of-way. Since the approval of this standard, Southwestern has implemented a more aggressive right-of-way clearing strategy to ensure it is following the guidelines laid out by NERC to protect the National grid.

### **Question. What prompted the new standard?**

**Answer.** For the most part, increased outages caused by inadequate vegetation management practices. In recent years, there have been more

and more incidents of blackouts, brownouts, and outages in general as more consumers are connected to the grid. Transmission planners try to keep up with the growing demand, but our National grid is strained, especially at peak times such as the middle of a summer day or a cold winter morning. When the transmission system experiences heavy loading, such as at these peak times, it is more vulnerable to widespread outages caused when a single line is tripped offline. One of the most severe outages in recent years, the Northeast Blackout of 2003, put more than 50 million people in the dark, and one of the primary causes found by the task force studying the cause of the blackout was a tree branch coming into contact with a power line due to vegetation in a transmission right-of-way.

### **Question. Does Southwestern have rules for homeowners for planting in the right-of-way?**

**Answer.** In urban areas, shrubbery, crops, and small trees might be acceptable, provided that they:

- **do not pose a danger to public safety** due to their proximity to Southwestern's transmission lines
- **do not impede access** to Southwestern's transmission structures
- **do not hinder crews** who perform right-of-way management and maintenance

In rural areas, it is often the case that the only way crews can reach Southwestern's transmission structures is to drive directly underneath the transmission lines in the middle of the right-of-way, so it is especially important that nothing be planted in this area. This is less the case in urban areas, where crews are generally able to gain access to Southwestern's transmission structures from existing public streets.

However, landowners and homeowners who plant directly under Southwestern's transmission lines, whether in an urban or rural setting, risk damage to their vegetation when crews bring in trucks and

equipment to perform management of the right-of-way or maintenance of transmission structures.

Additionally, if trees outside Southwestern's right-of-way pose a danger to Southwestern's transmission lines, Southwestern will designate the tree a "danger tree" and will recommend removal to the landowner or homeowner.

**Question. What gives Southwestern the right to perform this kind of vegetation management?**

**Answer.** Southwestern has an easement to the land adjacent to and underneath its transmission lines. This easement gives Southwestern the perpetual right to cut down any trees in its rights-of-way that may interfere with or endanger its transmission lines.

**Question. How will I be notified if Southwestern is going to cut or prune my trees?**

**Answer.** A Southwestern employee or contractor will attempt to contact each homeowner along the

right-of-way where vegetation management activities will be taking place at least a week before such activities begin. If the Southwestern employee or contractor is unable to make personal contact, a door hanger will be left on the main entrance to the house. The door hanger will include an estimate of when crews will be in the area and a contact number for the homeowner to call with any concerns or questions.

**Question. How can I get more information or talk to someone in person about Southwestern's vegetation management policies?**

**Answer.** You can contact Southwestern's Property group. Please e-mail your inquiry or call Southwestern's main number and ask for Property.

**Property**

[property@swpa.gov](mailto:property@swpa.gov)

**Southwestern Power Administration**

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