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## Trees And Electrical Lines Don't Mix!

Recent snowstorms have brought many winter safety issues to the attention of the Colestin Volunteer Rural Fire Department. On several occasions, the Fire Department responded to calls of downed electrical service lines, also known as drop lines or service drops. These are the wires that run from the pole down to your home. **It is the responsibility of the homeowner to keep trees clear of these lines.** According to Seattle Light's website, nearly one-third of power outages can be traced to tree interference.

Trees that grow into the power lines can cause problems in three ways:

- **Safety:** First, trees directly touching power lines put constant stress on live wires and cause branches to burn and fall to the ground, sometimes causing fires in trees. *Locally, CRFD noticed signs that fire may have resulted had the snow not been so heavy.* Second, the electricity in power lines poses no danger to you until it comes into contact with a ground or something touching the earth - like a tree. A grounded contact provides an alternate path for electricity to flow through, creating a safety hazard and a potential outage. The potential for electrical shock exists if a person causes a limb to touch a live wire or if something they are carrying, like a pole pruner, makes contact.
- **Voltage loss:** Trees touching power lines drain electricity off the electrical system resulting in voltage loss. Low voltage can damage motor-driven appliances such as refrigerators or washing machines, and sensitive electronics such as computers.
- **Storm-related outages:** Wind, snow and ice often damage trees. Branches, limbs and entire trees can fall on power lines, tearing down energized lines, transformers and poles. The resulting power outage can rob you of heat, lights, communication and refrigeration. During very severe storms, outages can last for days. *Many folks here can attest to the truth of this – living without heat, water pumps, telephone service, lights etc for several days during this last storm.*

Although the drop line is not a high-voltage line, using a professional is recommended to clear any dead, dying and living branches that are in the clearance zone around power lines. 10'-15' is a good minimum to consider.

**LOOK NOW at how your trees are behaving under snow load.** Next spring and summer when you are considering pruning trees back, you may not really recall just how low the limbs can go when weighted down with snow. Also consider line sag, which happens to power lines in hot weather, and the effect of wind causing both trees and lines to sway. The clearances are meant to hold in all weather conditions.

General info from: [Nevadapower.com](http://Nevadapower.com), [Sierrapacific.com](http://Sierrapacific.com), and [Seattle.gov](http://Seattle.gov).

*CRFD has spoken with Aardvark Tree Service in Ashland (488-5177), which will offer a discount for clearing work around drop lines if several folks want work done. All Clear Brush (488-7969) is also interested in working with us and [they] are ODF trained and have multiple other certifications.*