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CONTACT: Dixie Russell, Executive Director, (614) 771-7494

Stop...Don't Top!

Property owners across Ohio often express fear and safety concerns when considering the need for trimming trees. A homeowner may feel that a tree has become too large for his or her property, or that tall trees may pose an unacceptable risk. After all, the potential damage that a tree can cause when there is failure and collapse of the entire tree or major limbs can be scary, even catastrophic.

A tree trimming approach that owners sometimes consider to reduce the size of a tree is "topping" - the indiscriminate removal of limbs beyond a predetermined crown limit. Topping, however, is NOT a viable method of height reduction and certainly does not reduce future risk. In fact, topping causes serious damage to trees, inviting unwanted insects and tree diseases into the area and it actually increases the risk of limb failure in the long run. **Topping is perhaps the most harmful tree pruning practice known. Yet, despite more than 25 years of literature and seminars explaining its harmful effects, topping remains a common practice.**

To understand the problems associated with topping, it is important to understand that trees depend on their ability to produce food in the leaves and store it in the various cells of the tree. Removing major portions of a tree robs it of the resources it has stored to survive. In addition, the inside of the tree becomes exposed to insects, disease and decay as the tree is not able to protect the larger wounds by way of natural chemical hardening and wound closure growth. Finally, like Hydra the mythical multi-headed monster, trees that survive the excessive and improper pruning respond with excessive new growth, a sign of severe stress. These new sprouts do not have the same strength in cellular connection as the original limbs. The new sprouts grow quickly trying to reestablish dominance and eventually multiply the original problems.

Stop... Don't Top! Before killing the crown and risking your trees, the Ohio Chapter International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) urges Ohio property owners with concerns about trees to consult with a local ISA Certified Arborist. A Professional Certified Arborist can help you plan and manage your trees using accepted pruning practices for the best safety and health of the trees and all who enjoy them. To learn more about proper pruning practices or to find a local ISA Certified Arborist, go to www.treesaregood.org.

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ABOUT OCISA: The mission of the Ohio Chapter International Society of Arboriculture is to advance responsible tree care practices through research, technology, and education while promoting the benefits of trees. Visit us at: www.ohiochapterisa.org

INTERVIEW A CERTIFIED ARBORIST: Please contact the Ohio Chapter ISA if you are interested in interviewing a local certified arborist.

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Kent, OH

Ohio Chapter International Society of Arboriculture

Dixie Russell, CAE, CMP,
Executive Director & Secretary
PO Box 267
Columbus, OH 43105-9998
Phone/Fax (614) 771-7494
Email: dixie@OhioChapterISA.org