United States Department of Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service

after the fire

Hazard Tree Removal

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CAUTION: After a fire many trees are weakened from burning around the base of the trunk. The trees can fall over or blow down without warning. Shallow-rooted trees can also fall. Therefore be extremely alert when around burned trees.

What is hazard tree removal?

The work consists of removing dead and/or damaged trees that pose a hazard to people, animals, personal property, utilities, and other structures that might be damaged from falling trees.

When should trees be removed?

Dead trees that pose a threat to life or property may be located adjacent to homes, outbuildings, access roads and other structures. Assessing tree mortality is an important step in determining the risk to life and property. Refer to University of Idaho Extension's "After the Burn" or WA DNR's "Fire Injured Trees: Making an Initial Assessment of Whether a Tree is Likely to Die" for guidlines in assessing tree mortality.

How should trees be removed?

Work should be completed by qualified fallers and/or equipment operators. Inspect the tree prior to falling to identify any hazards such as cracks, mistletoe brooms or deformities in the bole or canopy that can increase the complexity of falling the tree. When cutting hazard trees, you should try to limit soil disturbance and the number of vehicular trips across your land. This will help to minimize erosion and noxious weed introduction. All branches should be cut from the tree and the trunk of tree should lay flat

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on the soil surface. Cut-tree material is often more valuable left on-site. Broadcasting chips from dead trees back onto the burned land can help reduce erosion. Log erosion barriers may help stabilize soils on slopes in some areas (see specification on Log Erosion Barriers). In addition, lopping and scattering limbs and finer material can help reduce surface water flow, erosion and improve soil condition by replacing organic matter and nutrients.

Safety precautions

Removing hazardous trees in burned areas is dangerous due to a significant risk that burned trees may fall unexpectedly or drop branches on workers with little or no warning- especially during times of high winds, heavy precipitation and/or saturated soils. Always use the appropriate personal protection gear when operating a chainsaw, such as: hard hat, gloves, eye protection, hearing protection, chaps and steel toed boots. Use chainsaws with spark arresters and review their safety instructions. Review safety instructions when using ATVs or other machinery.

In the years following the fire, many of the trees will begin to fall on their own as roots, trunks and limbs decay. Landowners should continue to be aware of these hazards.

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