



Spooky Trees

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It's October and that means it's spooky season! What better time to talk about "scary trees" than spooky season. I work on a university campus, where in the eyes of some people, every tree can be a scary tree. I'm sure many of you manage trees in similar situations, where you have to manage not only tree risk but also people's perceptions of tree risk.

A challenging yet essential part of our responsibility as arborists and urban foresters is to educate people on what makes a tree a natural hazard and how that translates into risk. Oftentimes we're the person in the room with the most knowledge about trees; who can make assessments about the health and safety of the trees in our care. The final decision of a tree's fate, however, is not in our hands.

The ISA TRAQ program makes the distinction between *tree risk assessors* and *tree risk managers*. Sometimes an arborist or urban forester will assume both roles, but in many municipal settings, we are only the assessor and can only make recommendations to the risk manager. This can be very difficult when that risk manager lacks the tree knowledge that we have. Additionally, the municipality's risk manager may be facing public pressure regarding how to address tree management in a particular area.

It can be hard for people to understand that some trees may remain standing for years, even though it has a hollowed section, while other trees, that appear to have a full and healthy canopy, are succumbing to serious root rot and are hazardous risks for people and property.

We must rely on our professional expertise and the growing body of tree care science when we inform risk managers and the public about the realities of tree risk. There are many misconceptions and preconceived notions about trees and tree risk, and it is often up to us to correct them. One principle I try to keep in mind and share with others when discussing these topics comes from Alex Shigo, the father of modern arboriculture:

"Trees have dignity. Dignity means to command respect."

We respect the trees in our care when we provide accurate assessments of their health and safety, whatever the recommendation may be. We also respect trees when pass it on to those who care about the trees that we maintain.