

Hire Licensed Tree Trimmers to Protect Yourself and Your Trees

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I received a report from the Evansville Department of Urban Forestry that some shady characters have been going door to door, trying to talk residents into hiring them to work on their trees. These people are not licensed to trim trees in Evansville, and could pose a serious threat to your trees and your checkbook.

There has been an ordinance since 2001 that states that anyone who trims trees for hire within Evansville city limits must have a license to do so. The license is free, and is given to any tree worker who attends a free training (that I help teach) once every three years; and who also carries the required amounts of liability and workman's compensation insurance.

The most likely reason a company has for not being licensed is that they don't carry the insurance. If they accidentally send a branch through your neighbor's roof, or if they hurt themselves, it is YOU who will pay the bills. Sure, it sounds great to save a couple of hundred dollars on a trimming job, but the risk of paying thousands of dollars of repair or medical bills (not to mention higher homeowner's insurance premiums) makes this a dangerous gamble.

Many of these unlicensed trimmers are scammers. They've been known to ask for their money up front, and either not come back to do the work, or not finish the job. Victims have been left with a pile of branches in their yard, half-butchered trees, and no way to contact the company to get their money back.

Most of these unlicensed trimmers are also ignorant of proper pruning. They top trees, ruining their appearance and setting them up for wood rot, suckering, and failure during storms.

When selecting someone to prune your trees:

- Ask for their Evansville tree trimmer's license and for their insurance information. The Urban Forestry website (www.evansvillegov.org/urbanforestry) has a list of licensed tree workers. Also, call the insurance company and give their account number, to make sure they actually have insurance.
- Is their company name and contact information on their truck and uniform? A lack of identifying information is a red flag. How will you get a hold of them if there's a problem?
- Are they local? If they are from out of town (or out of state), what are they doing here? Why aren't they making money in their own community?
- Legitimate tree companies are too busy to be out looking for work. Why do these people have the time to drive up and down your neighborhood, trying to convince you to have your trees pruned?

- Sign a contract or a work order before they start. The contract should have the company name and contact information, and should designate exactly what work they will be doing, and for exactly what price.
- Never pay up front! Wait until the work is done to your satisfaction and according to the signed agreement before you pay them.

If you are approached by someone going door to door, or who you suspect may be unlicensed, please call the Evansville Department of Urban Forestry at 812-436-5752. For more information on the correct way to prune your trees or to hire, contact the Purdue Extension Service at 812-435-5287.