



BE SAFE.....COMMUNICATE!

One of the keys to any successful relationship is good communication. Whether we're talking about a solid marriage or a successful business partnership the same holds true, it is important for one hand to know what the other is doing and visa-versa. In this way efforts can be consolidated for the common good and to ensure the most productive and beneficial results. This is especially true amongst a crew which is performing tree care operations. There needs to be a team effort so that the job will go smoothly and bring in a profit. There is another reason that good communication is crucial especially during tree care operations and that is safety.

One of the main goals of every tree care firm is to be profitable, otherwise why do it. To reach this goal it is important to be organized and to build a good team atmosphere. One person can't do the job alone and an efficient crew that works like a team, where everyone knows their tasks, will be a more productive team. This not only goes for the crew on the job but needs to start from the top down to the salesman, the general foreman and so on.

When reaching a job site one of the first duties should be a walk around of the site with the whole crew. Look for potential hazards and obstacles that need to be worked around or moved so that they will not create bigger problems later in the day. Next, form a plan of how the work should proceed, who should be assigned which tasks and how to work together to get the whole job done smoothly. Here it is very important that everyone is in on the planning so procedures can be talked through and everyone is on the same page. Part of the planning process is determining what equipment will be needed to carry out the plan. This is why it is important that there is good communication from the salesman. Hopefully the crew will have been apprised of any potential hazards or risks on the job and will have been instructed on all the equipment that will be needed. There is nothing worse than driving 40 minutes to a job only to find out that necessary tools are still back at the shop. Now that a plan has been formed and everyone is in synch it is time to get to work. Plan the work and work the plan.

Once the work has begun it is important to keep the communication lines open and active. I remember the first company I worked for, there was always bickering as to whether it was the climbers responsibility to watch out for the ground man or the ground mans responsibility to watch out for the climber. In reality it is some of both. The problem here is that each has his/her own job to do and they may not always be paying close attention to each other. Too often someone voices a command and assumes it was heard and understood. I often hear a worker in a tree yelling headache or heads up as they are dropping a piece of wood out of the tree. This may be something a crew member may or may not hear or acknowledge but would a homeowner or pedestrian understand this? Also with the loud equipment we work with at times it may be difficult to hear a command. A good practice is to wear a whistle.

At ArborMaster, we encourage the use of a simple voice command/response system. If I am in a tree and am taking out any piece of equipment (handsaw, chainsaw, rigging block etc.) that might be dropped to the ground I want to own that space below me so that no one is in danger of being hurt. The

command 'STAND CLEAR' is clear and to the point but it is equally important that I wait for the response 'ALL CLEAR' before I proceed. Conversely, if the ground person needs to come into that area to clear brush or cut wood they signal 'COMING UNDERNEATH' and wait for the 'ALL CLEAR'. Now they own that space until further stated. This way a running dialogue between ground person and climber will ensure that one hand knows what the other is doing.

The voice command response system also pertains to 'ground only' operations such as when a throwline is in use or during tree felling operations or during any task when someone else may be at risk. It pains me when I hear that someone has been hurt or even killed because of a falling limb or worse yet a falling tree because I know that better use of communication probably could have prevented it.

In closing, don't ever assume that someone has heard your warnings or commands make sure you wait for a response before you act, it could save a life. Good communication is not only a key to a well run and profitable business but also a safer one...All Clear!

Climb Safe....Rip Tompkins, ArborMaster