

## THE VALUE OF TREE INVENTORIES

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Trees can provide numerous benefits to any given site. Trees enhance our environment by blocking winds, creating shade, improving air quality, and filtering noise. Trees provide habitat for many species of insects, birds, and animals, which play an important role in our ecosystem. Their root systems serve as soil stabilizers minimizing erosion. Trees not only contribute positively to the environment, their inherent attributes of beauty provide a sense of well-being. Tree architecture, flowers and fruit, and fall color offer characteristics unmatched by any other site element. It's no wonder then that properties with trees bring a 20% increased value compared to similar properties without trees.

Are trees always an asset? Unfortunately not. All trees present some level of *risk*. With risk comes liability, especially to those properties and their managers, where visitors are invited to come and use the site. Property managers are responsible for *monitoring* and *maintaining* their trees to minimize liabilities and sustain their tree population's positive attributes.

Effective *tree management plans* begin with a thorough and systematic inventory and assessment of the existing trees. A complete inventory provides the property manager with detailed information about the types of trees on the site, the age, size, vigor, types of defects, and can reveal problems. Tree assessment is two-fold. Tree evaluations should provide information about the *health* of each tree as well as an assessment of the *structural integrity*. A tree may be supporting a full canopy of dark green leaves and be beautiful, but the internal structure may be decayed, subject to failure and posing a hazardous situation to the users of the site.

Lawsuits involving trees are becoming more common in today's litigious society. Most of them are brought on the basis of *negligence*. These lawsuits typically involve injury to a person or property and compensatory monetary damages are sought. In many of these cases there is a relationship that obligates the host (of a site) to protect the user (of the site) from foreseeable "unreasonable risk of harm". YOU, as a property manager, have just such a relationship with the users of your sites! You must provide your visitors protection from harm, which is that of a "reasonable and prudent professional". It is presumed that you, as a professional, have knowledge of grounds and proper maintenance and thereby are held to a higher standard of duty than general citizens. By employing risk management practices you may "stand in good stead" should an accident or injury occur involving trees on your site. This involves establishing an inspection system, documenting the observations, and following through with recommendations. This is where a systematic *Tree Inventory and Assessment* will aid you in your proactive tree maintenance.

A complete and thorough tree inventory identifies tree maintenance needs. If you're contracting out this service, these needs should be *prioritized* in the final report. The tree inventory and assessment should give the site manager prioritized (high, medium, low) pruning, cabling, and tree removal information. Also, irrigation, fertilization, mulching, and pest management issues should be recommended in a prioritized manner. All of this information aids in short and long-range planning and budgeting. With detailed information, bid specifications can be more precise.

Information and data gathered through a tree inventory and assessment is invaluable for communicating to stakeholders what must to be done to properly maintain the trees at a given property. The estimated monetary value of trees can also be derived through a comprehensive tree assessment. This known value often justifies to decision-makers the necessity of an on-going maintenance program accompanied by appropriate budgets. Knowing tree conditions and value is important for insurance purposes if there ever is a loss due to storms or other events. Knowing the condition of trees and their value *prior* to the damage makes it easier to justify replacement costs for insurance claims, rather than after the tree(s) is destroyed.

Overall, a tree inventory and assessment will provide you and your property managers a set of information to prioritize maintenance activities and thereby prolonging the health, beauty, and structural integrity of your sites' living assets – the trees. Inventory data and the recommendations are a living document and should be regularly updated. Tree inventories and assessments are worth your investment and follow-through. This conference talk will cover additional information about tree inventories, conditions, hazards, and related issues and activities.