

Gil Mitchell

Trees represent a great asset to a golf course. Unfortunately, they can also represent a great liability. Recently, the City of Gilroy, California, was ordered to pay a man over \$600,000 because an oak tree in one of the city's parks fell over and severed the man's arm off. The judge felt that the city was negligent in that it didn't maintain the tree in safe condition.

This court case has sent shudders through the arboriculture industry. The reason is that every arborist knows all trees will eventually fail. But which trees will fail first and when will the failure occur? Will individual limbs break off or will the entire tree fall over? These questions are difficult to answer, but a trained arborist learns to identify key criteria when doing a hazard evaluation.

When doing a hazard evaluation, the tree is divided into three areas: The root crown and root zone, the mainstem and major scaffold limbs, and the foliage including smaller branches. Let's do a brief analysis of a tree from the "top down."

Foliage that is sparse,

dead, or dying indicates a tree in poor health. A tree in poor health can be a hazard. Conversely, thick foliage growing on structurally weak limbs can cause breakage, too. Siberian Elm trees are notorious for outgrowing their structural support.

Major scaffold limbs that have tight "V" crotches are hazards that, in many cases,

limb incorrectly, decay will follow. This can create future hazards.

Root zone or root crown damage and decay is the cause of entire trees failing and falling over. In young trees, the problem is poor planting techniques and/or faulty irrigation practices. In old trees, it can be from mechanical damage, a change

tional year's growth on a poorly structured or anchored tree can break a tree apart long before the storm season.

To minimize a golf course's liability for personal and property damage, it would be wise to have a Certified Arborist evaluate all trees near structures and where people congregate. If and when a tree limb does create damage, an arborist's report will help prove that the golf course took responsibility for their trees.

Arbor Care

Hazard Trees Represent A Liability For A Golf Course

can be alleviated through trimming and cabling. Very young trees should have "V" crotches removed as soon as possible, or better still, not be selected at the nursery. Old pruning wounds on scaffold limbs and the mainstem should be monitored for wound closure and/or decay present. When a tree worker removes a major scaffold

in grade, and/or faulty irrigation practices.

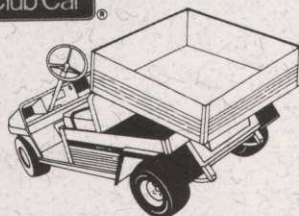
One misconception people have is that trees fall over or limbs break off only in storms. Unfortunately, and especially for golf courses, this is not true. Trees are just as likely, or in the case of deciduous trees, more likely, to fail in July and August. The reason is that an addi-



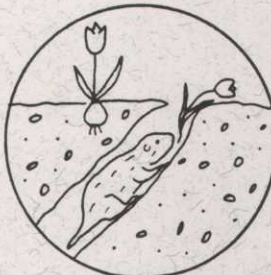
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