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Virginia Tech Tree Risk Assessment Procedure

OVERVIEW

Urban trees must be managed by qualified professional arborists to reduce risk, maximize returns on investment, and limit liability. Planning tree inspections on a scheduled cycle, per the Virginia Tech Tree Inspection Procedure, can help identify tree risk that may be mitigated before serious harm to the health or structure of a tree occurs, and will help prevent further risk to the public and property. If a routine tree inspection reveals a structural defect or other condition that requires further assessment, a tree risk assessment may be necessary, unless immediate mitigation is required as determined by the Urban Forestry Team.

GOALS

This procedure:

- shall accompany the development of the Virginia Tech Tree Policy
- shall provide high-quality arboriculture practice on Virginia Tech's properties
- shall ensure known trees with defects/conditions requiring investigation are assessed
- shall allow the Urban Forestry Team to mitigate risk in a timely manner
- shall optimize the safety and value of trees on Virginia Tech properties

PROPOSED SPECIFICATIONS

Qualified Practitioners:

All tree risk assessments shall be performed by an ISA Qualified Tree Risk Assessor within the office of the Urban Forestry Team or contracted by the Team as necessary.

Risk Management:

While all trees pose some level of risk to the public and property, the level of risk associated with campus trees may be managed through tree inspections and mitigation practices to an acceptably low level, as determined by the Urban Forestry Team, with the ultimate goal of low risk posed by campus trees.

As the Urban Forestry Team follows the Virginia Tech Tree Inspection Procedure, some trees may show evidence of structural defects or health conditions that could pose unacceptable risk to the Virginia Tech Community. These trees shall be scheduled for tree risk assessment as soon as practical. A work order shall be filed with the tree ID logged.

Assessment Protocol:

All tree risk assessments shall conform to ANSI Z133 and ANSI A300 standards unless authorized by the Urban Forestry Team.

The level of tree risk assessment, level 1, 2, or 3 shall be dictated by the tree defects and conditions recognized by the arborist at the site.

Tree Risk Assessment Levels

Level 1 – This is a limited visual assessment of an individual tree or population of trees. It can be performed as a “drive-by” assessment in the case of many trees or even as a limited assessment as might be performed during maintenance planning.

Level 2 – The Level 2 assessment is a 360-degree visual evaluation of a tree where the crown, trunk, trunk flare, above-ground roots, and site conditions are evaluated in regard to targets. The Level 2 assessment is often carried out using the ISA Basic Tree Risk Assessment form.

Level 3 – This category would include any risk assessment that would exceed the Level 2 category including aerial assessments, decay detection through drilling or tomography, and root crown examinations.

Most trees should require a level 1 or level 2 assessment. Trees with defects or conditions that require specialized tools and techniques may necessitate a level 3 assessment.

Tree risk assessments must follow the ISA Tree Risk Assessment process. The Basic Tree Risk Assessment Form may not be required to collect data for level 1 or level 2 assessments, but the tree risk assessor shall utilize the form for all level 3 tree risk assessments.

Assessment time frames shall be appropriate for the tree and the site, as determined by the tree risk assessor. Conditions or sites that present greater uncertainty to the tree risk assessor may require shorter time frames for the risk assessment. High profile/high-value trees should be assessed within a shorter time frame than other trees.

Some trees may require witness interviews when collecting data. These interviews may provide the assessor with historical context and observations from the past; the Urban Forestry Advisory Committee should be consulted when assessing these trees. The majority of trees may not require witness interviews but the Urban Forest Advisory Committee may be consulted as needed.

Tree risk assessment records shall be kept in the Urban Forestry Team; written notes and field documents shall be filed with annual field records and digital reports shall be filed with other preservation reports. Reports may be required for high risk/high profile/high-value trees and shall be shared with the Urban Forestry Advisory Committee.

Required mitigation practices or followup assessments shall be scheduled in HokieServe and completed as is practical, as determined by the Urban Forestry Team. Please see the Virginia Tech Tree Work Order Procedure.

PROJECTED OUTCOMES

Virginia Tech's urban canopy is of great value and is subjected to various biotic and abiotic pressures/stressors. Each tree in the canopy (and the site where it grows) must be managed individually for risk management, good vitality, sound structure, and sustainability. This procedure will ensure trees that may pose unacceptable risk to the public, property, or services are identified through the Virginia Tech Tree Inspection Procedure and facilitates the reduction of risk posed by campus trees.