

Frequently Asked Questions *In Utility Arboriculture*

Remember:

- You do this every day...
 - *The customer knows nothing about our work.*
- You've said this a million times...
 - *The customer has never heard this before.*



Always listen to customer questions and provide clear, polite answers.

Q: Why was I not informed about this work?

A: We attempt to notify all customers ahead of time. We apologize if we somehow missed you.

Q: Why do you have to trim my trees?

A: For the SAFETY and RELIABILITY of your electric service!

- Trees can be a frequent cause of power outages.
- Downed lines are very dangerous and can cause wildfires.
- One tree can take out power for a whole neighborhood.
- Compliance with state law.

Q: How much will it cost?

A: You will not be billed. SAFE and RELIABLE power is part of our service to you.

Q: While you are here, can you remove that tree by my house?

A: Sorry, but we can only work on trees that could affect the power lines.

Q: Can you top the whole tree?

A: Topping is bad for trees and makes the tree grow back into the lines faster. We only prune the part of the tree that could affect the lines.

Q: Why did you do my neighbor's trees differently from mine?

A: The neighbor's trees...

- Are farther from the power lines, or
- Are slower (or faster) growing, or
- Require more work than yours.
- We prune the branches that could affect the power lines, and allow the ones growing away to remain.

Q: Why do you have to trim so much?

A: To improve the SAFETY and RELIABILITY of your electric service, especially during storms.

- Those lines carry much higher voltage than household current.
- This is a fast-growing tree with a high failure rate.
- We prune branches growing toward the lines, which reduces the amount of pruning required in the future.

Q: Will my tree be unbalanced if you trim just one side?

A: No. The roots keep the tree stable and are not affected by our pruning. The tree now will shed the wind better, and your property is SAFER, and your power is more RELIABLE, because the tree can't touch those high-voltage power lines.

Q: Who gave you permission to trim MY trees on MY property?

A: SDG&E is required by law to provide a SAFE and RELIABLE supply of electricity for all of our customers. This sometimes requires us to work on private property.

Q: What if I refuse to let you do this work?

A: We will respect your wishes for the moment. We apologize for any misunderstanding. Please sign this refusal form. Someone will get back to you about this.

Q: Who do I contact regarding damage done to my property?

A: You can reach my General Foreman at this number, or I can have him call you.

Q: Why don't you just put the wires underground?

A: This is not my specialty, but underground installation requires trenching that would damage tree roots.

Customer Relations *In Utility Arboriculture*

To improve customer relations, and how our work is seen by the public:

- Make a good first impression
- Communicate the benefits of our work
- Anticipate customer concerns
- Answer their questions
- Do the work in a safe and professional manner

You are a **PROFESSIONAL**

- Knowledge and experience: *You know this business*
- Communication: *Listen and explain*
- Integrity: *Be honest, follow up, keep promises*
- Appearance: *Look like a professional utility arborist*
- Attitude: *Be positive in your approach*



Practice Active Listening

Active listening is a communications technique that makes sure that the customer is heard. Better communication builds trust and reduces misunderstandings and complaints. To practice active listening:

- Focus your attention on the customer
- Hear what the customer is saying
- Confirm that you are listening by nodding, saying “yes, I understand,” “go on,” etc.
- Restate what you hear back to the customer, e.g., “You said that you were sad to lose that tree and I am sorry about that.”

Use Friendly Language

Utility pruning is a service for the customer:

- Improves the safety and reliability of their utility service.
- Protects their property from wildfire.

Avoid saying:

- The work is to “protect SDG&E lines,”
- We are here to “protect SDG&E property.”

Friendly language is respectful of the customer and their property. Instead of saying, “You have to let us cut your trees,” use a more friendly tone, such as, “It will be safer if we can get those trees away from those high-voltage lines.” This is more polite and makes a case for why the work is needed.

Friendly language is understandable. Avoid using jargon, like “We’ll need a bucket to reach the three-phase conductors.” The average customer does not know that a “bucket” is an aerial lift, what “three-phase” means, or that a conductor is a power line, not a person. Use language that the customer will understand, such as, “We’ll bring in a lift truck to prune the branches away from the high-voltage power lines.”

Dealing with Angry Customers

- Stay calm, don’t argue, stay in control of your emotions
 - *If you lose your temper, you lose!*
- Be patient, let the customer blow off steam
 - *Listen and show genuine concern*
- Acknowledge errors
 - *Correcting a mistake is good customer service*
- Know when to quit
 - *Don’t risk your safety and don’t waste your time*