

Power Line Right of Way Clearing Program

The Utilities Board of the City of Sylacauga makes every effort to maintain reliable electric service to customers. We continue to explore better ways of accomplishing this goal. Most of the outages on the electrical system are caused by vegetation growing into power lines, trees falling on lines, or limbs falling on lines. By proper tree management within the line Right of Ways (ROW's) we are able to decrease these occurrences.

The Sylacauga Utilities Board has contracted with Burford's Tree Service Inc. who specializes in utility line clearing. Currently we are operating (2) three-man line crews, a mowing crew, and a ticket crew. Cutting and removing trees and brush as well as working around energized power lines, is a dangerous job. The cost associated with this process has increased. Even though these costs have increased, the Utilities Board still provides Electrical service at a lower rate, through the purchased power from AMEA.

The following are frequently asked questions pertaining to power line right of way (ROW) clearing:

Q. Why do I sometimes lose power, especially during high winds or storms?

During high winds and storms, trees and other vegetation may meet energized conductors, causing a direct connection with ground. This in turn will cause momentary or complete loss of power. This may eventually cause the fuses on the main line to break the circuit, creating a loss of power on the entire line. The loud noise that you hear when this happens is usually the blown fuse.

Trees touching wires can also cause the line to burn down as well as cause the tree itself to burn.

Tall trees located several feet away from the line can fall during a storm which causes considerable damage. This type of event usually affects the substations and in turn causes widespread outages, and extensive damage to the lines and poles. It is not possible to cut or trim every tree that could cause damage to power lines. During these events, the Utilities Board works to restore power as quickly as possible.

Proper ROW clearing is essential for maintaining a consistent power supply, as well as allowing for easy access by the line crew to make necessary repairs.

Q. Do you have to cut MY trees?

The Utilities Board understands the customer's concern for the trees on or near their property. The trees are a beautiful asset to Sylacauga. With the goal of maintaining a reliable power supply and customer satisfaction, we must maintain the line ROW to prevent power outages. No one wants to be out of power for extended periods.

Hospitals, schools, businesses, customers on life support, traffic signals, and other utilities, all depend on constant electrical supply. This can only be accomplished by proper tree management practices.

If the contractor is working in your area and has not been able to contact you regarding your trees, please contact the Utilities Board and relay your concerns before trimming begins. 256.249.0372 or www.sylacauga.net, and choose the link (HOW CAN WE ASSIST YOU?)

We will explore all approved methods and work with our customers as much as possible. However, maintaining the power supply for you and your neighbors should take priority.

Dead trees near power lines are problems waiting to happen. These should be reported to the Utilities Board Electric Department as soon as possible. If you would like to know when the lines are scheduled to be trimmed in your area, please contact the Utilities Board. The trimming cycle is usually between 3 and 5 years, depending on the area.

Q. How far away from the power line does the Utilities Board trim?

The Utilities Board's contractors are instructed to trim and maintain our right of ways using the following guidelines:

1. All three phase circuits are trimmed ten feet from the center of the line.
2. All single-phase circuits are trimmed ten feet from the center of the line.
3. All services are trimmed five feet around.

Q. If I notice a tree that could pose a threat to the power lines, how do I report this?

There has been an issue this year with dead trees. Other utilities are experiencing this problem, especially with pine trees. Any dead tree around an energized circuit will be placed on the list for prompt removal. Please call the Utilities Board Operations Center and ask for the Electric Department. Call 256.249.0372. An employee from the Electric Department will come out and determine when the removal will be scheduled.

Q. If a tree on my property is not a threat, but needs removing, will the Utilities Board do this for me?

We are not able to cut all the trees that a customer may wish to have removed from their property. These will need to be removed by a Licensed Tree Contractor, to be employed by the customer. The contractor will need to call the Utilities Board if the service to the building needs to be dropped or moved to avoid damage to the line and building. To avoid damage to other utilities in the area, the Line location

center for Sylacauga (Alabama 1 Call @ 1-800-292-8525) should be called if the stump is to be removed or any excavation is needed.

Q. How close to a power line should I plant a tree?

We encourage our customers that are interested in planting trees or vegetation to consider types that grow at a slower rate, and that do not typically grow tall enough to interfere with the lines overhead. The best practice is to locate trees away from power line easements. Easy access to the lines will ensure that the power can be restored quickly.

Q. If I see a problem with a tree, on or near the line, should I attempt to clear the line myself?

It is very important that anyone who notices a problem with trees contacting power lines call their electric service provider. Never try to remove them yourself. If you are performing work on your property near power lines, please contact the Utilities Board before work begins. 256.249.0372 Safety First! Use extreme caution while installing antennas, working from a ladder, painting near a line, or pruning trees with a pole saw. Keep a safe distance away from all power lines.

Q. Why do you need to trim so much of the tree?

We must maintain a minimum clearance of ten feet around the line. If the tree has grown under the line, it is best practice to remove the tree completely if possible. The best trimming techniques will be used.

Q. My trees aren't touching the lines, why do you have to trim them?

When determining whether to trim a tree, or how much to trim, several factors will influence this decision.

4. Will strong winds cause the tree to sway into the lines?
5. Sagging lines due to high temperature may cause contact.
6. Estimating the growth and structure of the tree could warrant trimming.
7. The estimated time between trimming cycles.

Planning minimizes outages.

Q. Under what circumstances can you enter my property and trim my trees?

The Sylacauga Utilities Board has a responsibility to maintain the electric system in such a way that reliable electric service is safely and consistently provided to everyone on our system. The easement (property where the poles and lines are located) allows access to the lines. We will endeavor to show consideration and protect our customer's property while maintaining the lines. If you are unsure as to where the easement boundary is located, please contact the Electric Department for this information. Please contact the Utilities Board before building anything on or near the power line easement.

Q. Will I lose power while the trees are being trimmed or cut down?

In most cases you will not lose power while trimming. Our contractors specialize in trimming and removing trees and vegetation around energized lines.

Q. What is the green box near the property line?

Customers that have underground circuits may have a pad mount transformer on their property. These are the green boxes you will often see near the edge of the property line.

Some of our customers will plant shrubs around these transformers to hide them as much as possible. This may solve one problem but creates another. The pad mounted transformers will need to be visible and readily available when there is trouble, and especially at night. Therefore, it is important to plant correctly for maintenance and repair. Linemen need room to work safely on these devices. Please keep shrubs and structures ten feet away from the front of the enclosure, and a minimum of one foot from the other three sides. Planting vegetation too close to these devices can also cause overheating due to poor ventilation. Obstructions (flowers, shrubs, or structures) may be damaged or removed during service restoration and maintenance.

Q. Who should I contact for any tree trimming issues or questions?

Call the Sylacauga Utilities Board Operations Center at 256.249.0372.

By working together, we will be able to reduce the number of outages and maintain a reliable power supply.