

CAL FIRE NEWS RELEASE

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection



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Watch Out for Scam Artists Posing as Arborists

Sacramento – Communities and homeowners throughout California have experienced serious damage to trees due to harsh winter weather and very heavy snow fall. After a storm, it is common for people claiming to be "tree specialists" to show up at residents' front doors offering their services to remove or repair damaged trees. Contractors seem to come out of the woodwork after a storm and are often inexperienced and not qualified to properly care for trees and their damage following a storm. They are often people who are unlicensed to do the work.

Unfortunately, many such individuals have little or no training, and sometimes have little interest in removing anything but money from the pocketbooks of unsuspecting residents.

CAL FIRE and the Arbor Day Foundation are urging homeowners not be a victim. "Make sure you are dealing with a reputable individual or tree care firm when you contemplate repairs or removal of any trees on your property," warns John Rosenow, president of The Arbor Day Foundation. "Legitimate arborists rarely go door to door to solicit business."

Here are eight guidelines to help you find qualified tree-care specialists:

1. Make sure they are part of an established business in the community or nearby area, with a listing in the phone book, usually under Tree Service.
2. Have them provide you with evidence that they are actually working for the company, rather than moonlighting.
3. Ask for a California Contractor's License or a Timber Operator's License. Including current certificates of insurance showing that they are fully insured for property damage, personal liability, and worker compensation.
4. Ideally, they should be members of a professional association of arborists such as the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA), or the American Society of Consulting Arborists (ASCA).
5. Arborists who have received certification from their professional associations, such as ISA Certified Arborists, will have received training and access to current technical information on tree care, repair, and removal.
6. If possible, get more than one estimate to ensure that the price offered is competitive with that offered by others for the same services.

7. In the case of tree removals, have a clear understanding about who removes the limbs and debris from the property, and whether or not the price includes stump removal and clean up.
8. Check to see if the estimate has considered the possible value your tree will have as logs, firewood or chips, either to yourself or if sold to others.

"Above all, don't be pressured into making immediate decisions by a "tree specialist", do your homework and make sure they are qualified," warns Thom Porter, staff chief of Resource Management for CAL FIRE's Southern Region. "It is important to take the time to select a qualified tree professional to safeguard your trees and to save you from the long-term consequences of using the wrong contractor to clean up after a storm."

Many cities require arborists to be licensed and will maintain lists of firms and individuals so registered. Residents can check with their local Forester who cares for public trees in their communities. Sometimes this is a function of the county or city's parks department or public works department. For more information on CAL FIRE's Resource Management Program or to reach a State Forester please visit www.fire.ca.gov.

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