

The Tribune

San Luis Obispo

Even with a trim now and then, trees will fall down, officials say

Thirteen city- and private-owned trees toppled over in San Luis Obispo during Tuesday's storm. Leslie Griffy - The Tribune

SAN LUIS OBISPO, October 20, 2004 - At least 13 trees fell in San Luis Obispo during Tuesday's first big storm of the year. One city-owned ficus landed on two cars and smashed the awning and roof of Marsh Street buildings, which brought back memories of the storms of spring 2003 when Mission Grill and an auto dealer were damaged by falling city trees.

Then, the city blamed the tree damage on cuts to the tree-trimming budget. But this week, interim director of public works Jay Walter said that the program has one additional tree trimmer, although the city is looking to hire another. Falling trees is just a natural consequence of storm season, he said.

Greg McPherson, director of the Center of Urban Forest Research at UC Davis, agrees. Thirteen trees down in one day might seem like a lot, but for a town with 25,000 city-owned trees that's not a bad average, McPherson said.

Both city-owned and private-owned trees caused Tuesday's damage. "It is a natural process. The trees that come down are often trees that were prone to failure, but, sometimes, that failure is hard to detect," McPherson said.

The city trees are trimmed on a rotating basis, with each tree getting cut back about once every five years. That cycle works for many older trees, said McPherson. But even with good care, he warns, trees will come down. That isn't enough for Holly Mislavsky, whose business was damaged by the fallen tree on Nipomo and Marsh streets. "I just think they need to cut them back. The trees are so top heavy," she said. "It's pretty common sense for them to know that someone could get hurt."

The damaged storefront will be the new home of Central Coast Restaurant Supplies, which Mislavsky owns with her husband, Claude. At this point, she wasn't sure how much the damage would cost or if the store's opening, scheduled for this month, would need to be delayed.

McPherson said it was normal for people to be wondering about the city's trees right now. "I think people take (trees) for granted until they are in the street or they are gone. When people see the gap they start to think about the tree," he said.

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