

Hiring a Tree Service without General Liability or Workers' Compensation Insurance: A Recipe for Financial Disaster

Many people are unaware that the tree care industry is one of the most dangerous professions out there. Tree care employees work at extreme heights and large loads, while using dangerous tools, such as chain saws. This danger is compounded by working near power lines, busy roadways, and other infrastructure obstacles.

In most cases, consumers tend to lump tree care companies in with landscapers – after all, they both do “tree work,” right? But there’s a **big difference** – landscapers do **not** usually work in the high-risk situations listed above and their insurance does **not** cover these risks.

Two Types of Tree Care Companies

It’s important to understand how a tree care company will protect the health and safety of your trees, but it’s just as important to know **how the tree care company is going to protect you from potential liability**.

Tree companies generally into two categories: **“Tree Guys”** or **Arborists**:

“Tree Guys” will state or advertise that they are “Fully Insured” with liability and workers comp, while not truly understanding what coverage is actually required. In most cases when a company says “Fully Insured”, it means nothing.

Arborists, on the other hand, work very closely with industry associations, such as the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), to stay at the forefront of the tree care industry while meeting or exceeding safety and tree care standards. Arborists are passionate about their industry and deliver a level of care and professionalism that greatly exceeds the “Tree Guys”.

About Workers Compensation

Workers compensation is legally required in North Carolina for companies with three or more employees. It covers injuries that tree care company employees suffer while at work. This is really the only protection you have from the liability of someone being injured while working on your property.

Without workers compensation, tree companies are legally required to take responsibility for work-related injuries. However, as the property owner you are next in line. **If you hire a tree care company that has no workers compensation coverage, you will be required to pay the bill if an employee is injured and the company cannot pay.** You can sue the company to recover damages, but you have to pay for the injured person’s medical bills, lost wages and costs associated with the injury in the meantime.

How to Protect Yourself

When requesting tree care estimates, ask to see the Certificate of Insurance (COI) from the company. The COI should list their policy number and limits.

Example:

General Liability - \$1 million each occurrence and \$2 million aggregate

Automobile Liability - \$1 million each accident

Workers Compensation- \$500,000 per accident

Go ahead and call the listed insurance company to confirm the policy is real and in good standing, as some "Tree Guys" have been known to produce fraudulent COIs.

No matter what, if a company takes offense to requesting this information or hesitates to provide it, you probably shouldn't be doing business with them.