

# Trimming Trees Near Electric Lines

Understanding Niagara Mohawk's  
Role and Responsibilities



Niagara Mohawk

A **National Grid** Company



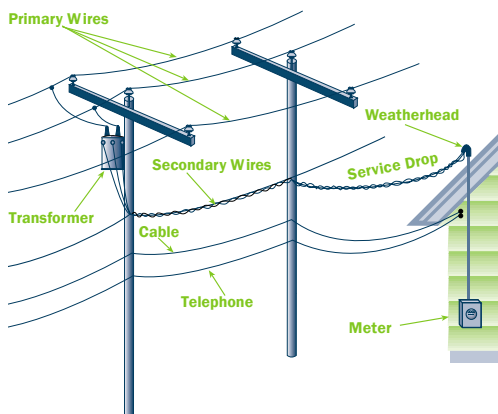
## Staying Connected

If you've called Niagara Mohawk with a tree-trimming request, you know we ask a lot of questions. That's because we need to determine whether your call may involve an emergency that could affect your electric service or even cause a safety hazard, or whether it can be safely handled during our routine tree trimming. Your observations help us determine how your request is handled, which makes our questions—and your answers—very important.

We've prepared this publication to help you understand our tree-trimming practices and how our Forestry Department works to protect your Niagara Mohawk electric service safely and efficiently. Please read this information carefully and use it whenever calling us about your tree-related questions and concerns. Our Customer Service number is 1-800-NIAGARA (642-4272).

When you call Niagara Mohawk and use the terms defined on pages two, three and four to describe your circumstances, you help our representatives meet your needs more efficiently. Thank you!

## Determining What's Involved



When you call Niagara Mohawk, using the following terms to describe your circumstances can help our representatives meet your needs more efficiently:

**UTILITY LINE:** Any wire, including electric, cable television or telephone

**ELECTRIC TRANSFORMER:** A gray- or black-colored, barrel-shaped object mounted on the pole below the primary electric wires. A transformer reduces the primary voltage levels down to the household voltage levels.

**ELECTRIC LINE:** Any wire carrying electricity through the utility system that runs from the electric generation facility to the

meter at your house. Niagara Mohawk categorizes its distribution service system into three types of wires:

*Primary Electric Wire:* The electric wires that run from pole to pole, usually along the street. These wires may run through backyards in urban areas or off the road and across country in rural areas. Where more than one utility line (telephone or cable television) is mounted on the same pole, the primary electric wires are at the top of the pole.

*Secondary Wire:* The electric wires that run from pole to pole and are located six to eight feet below the primary electric wires. They are found below the level of the transformer and carry household voltage from the transformer to the individual service lines to your home.

*Service Drop, Electric Service Line or Service Lateral:* The electric wires that run from the pole to the meter at your residence. The most common service drop is known as triplex wire. It consists of a bare center wire with two black, coated wires wrapped around it. On older homes, the service drop may be three small wires running parallel to each other from the transformer pole or secondary tap to an attachment point on your residence.

**INSULATOR:** The porcelain support used to insulate the wires from the pole. All electric lines require an insulator to attach the wires to the pole or to your residence at the weatherhead.

**WEATHERHEAD:** Found on many homes, a weatherhead is a protective metal or plastic service bracket attachment located at the point where the line is connected to your residence. Any line that attaches to your weatherhead and/or insulator and meter is an electrical line.

### Identifying Your Electric Service

When it comes to telling electric lines apart from telephone or cable lines, keep the following in mind:

- Primary electric lines are always at or near the top of the pole.
- All electric lines are attached at the pole through an insulator.
- Only electric lines run through a transformer.
- The line that attaches to your weatherhead and meter is an electric line.

If in doubt about any line, trace the line from the pole back toward your residence. Look for an insulator, transformer or a connection to your weatherhead and meter. If any of these are present, the line is electric.

## Your Information Is Key

To help ensure safe, reliable service for our 1.5 million electric customers, the Niagara Mohawk Forestry Department controls trees and vegetation growing near electric facilities. In all, our Forestry crews protect some 1.2 million utility poles and more than 36,000 miles of electric lines.

While the work of our Forestry crews helps Niagara Mohawk maintain the highest service reliability, you—as a Niagara Mohawk customer—are also essential to that effort.

When you call Niagara Mohawk about trees or limbs on your property, please give our representative as much information as possible. You'll help us target our response more efficiently and cost effectively—which helps us better serve all of our customers.

When calling us, please be prepared to answer these questions:

- Do you have power? Are your lights dim or flickering?
- Is a broken tree, branch or limb leaning on or hanging over Niagara Mohawk's lines? If so, approximately how long has it been there? How large is the limb (in both diameter and length)?

- Is the limb or tree on a pole-to-pole line? If so, is it on a primary or secondary electric wire?
- Is the limb or tree on the service line from the pole to your meter or weather-head?
- Is a tree arcing or burning in the lines?
- If an overhead line is involved, is it owned by Niagara Mohawk? Or does it belong to your telephone or cable television company or other service provider?
- Is the tree growing into an overhead primary electric line?

As a result of our cyclical tree-trimming program, statistics show that only a small percentage of tree-related outages are the result of a tree *growing into* our wires. Most tree-related outages are now caused by a limb, branch or entire tree *falling onto* the wires.

If you have questions about trimming around your house service, please review them with our crews when they are in your neighborhood at the time of your area's next scheduled tree trimming.

## Policies and Procedures

### Tree-Trimming Requests

Our Forestry Department schedules tree trimming in your area every five to six years, following recognized industry “best practices.”

We will let you know about our routine trimming—by letter, door hanger or crew visit—when work is scheduled on your lines.

If you have a routine tree-trimming request about the service line to your house, please advise our crew at that time. We will review your request or concern when we have crews in your neighborhood for routine circuit trimming. This helps us ensure efficient customer service throughout our service area.

Please note: We will dispatch crews to remove larger broken limbs that are pressing on your service lines and to assess trim requests for trees that have grown into the primary line.

When a property owner denies us the right to properly trim trees at the time of routine trimming, the refusal is documented. We may ask you to sign a statement accepting responsibility for damages related to the reduced trimming.

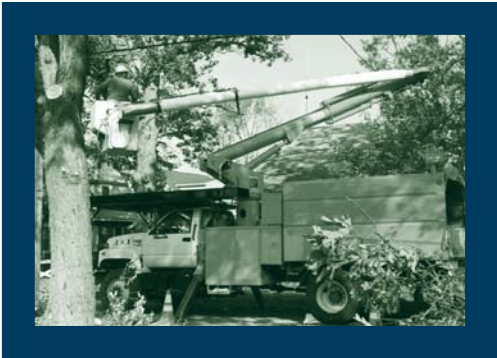
## Tree Removal Requests

Any time that you are planning to trim or remove trees that are near our *primary* lines, a Forestry representative will visit your home to assess the potential for hazard and outage risk. Please contact us at least five days in advance of your planned work.

Niagara Mohawk does not perform complete tree removal for service drops to your house. This work can be done by a qualified contractor who employs tree trimmers specifically trained to work within 10 feet of electrical hazards. Before hiring, ask your contractor to verify that he or she is electrically qualified and trains his/her workers to recognize and safely work around electrical hazards.

Any time you or your contractor will be working within 10 feet of *any* overhead line, you are responsible for notifying Niagara Mohawk *before* performing this work. In certain cases involving primary wires, a Niagara Mohawk crew may provide sufficient clearance to enable your hired contractor to safely complete the job. In some situations there may be a charge for this work.





When our crews visit your home for tree trimming or removal at your request, you will be required to sign an authorizing agreement before we can begin work. Once limbs or trees have been safely moved away from electric lines, remaining debris cleanup is the responsibility of the property owner.

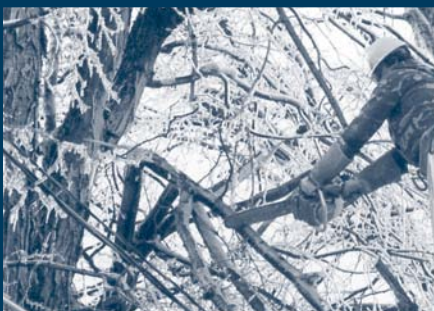
### Storm-Damaged Trees

A storm can damage just a few trees—or it can affect thousands across a wide area. Storm damage itself can range from broken or split limbs to broken or uprooted trees.

Niagara Mohawk is responsible for clearing storm-damaged trees from our electric lines and facilities in order to:

- restore service,
- allow reasonable access for emergency service restoration, or
- ensure future service reliability.

The cleanup of storm debris removed from on or over Niagara Mohawk facilities, or to provide emergency access, remains the responsibility of the owner of the tree, whether public or private. Following major storms your local municipality often assists in the cleanup of storm debris.



## For Your Protection

### Plan Ahead for Safety

You can help protect your home and community by planting tall-growing trees away from electric lines and right-of-ways. Tall-growing trees planted beneath or adjacent to electric lines present a future hazard and eventually will require trimming or removal.

Ask your local nursery about compatible, low-growing trees that are suitable for planting beneath electric lines. For information, please call Niagara Mohawk Customer Service at 1-800-NIAGARA (642-4272).

## Choose a Qualified Contractor

Hiring a qualified tree-service professional is important to ensuring the safety of your family, home and neighbors. Make sure the company or individual you hire is insured and a member of New York Arborists, the International Society of Arboriculture and/or the Utility Arborists Association.

*Your contractor also must have National Arborist Association training for their employees to educate them in electrical hazards when working in proximity to electrical overhead lines.*

Niagara Mohawk, a National Grid company, provides electric service to approximately 1.5 million customers and natural gas to approximately 540,000 customers in upstate New York. The company is based in Syracuse. Its parent company also has electricity distribution operations in New England. National Grid is an international, U.K.-based company that builds, owns, and manages electricity and telecommunication networks.

# Niagara Mohawk

A **National Grid** Company



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Lit. # 0500  
4/02



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