

War of the roses:

Neighbour disagreements and
'backyard logging' close calls with electricity
heat up in spring.



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Whether sharing a property line in a detached home, or living in a condo or apartment building, the vast majority of British Columbians must deal with having neighbours, and it turns out most find something their neighbours do downright annoying. As spring begins, so do the outdoor disputes, from disagreements over ugly lawn or balcony décor to overgrowing trees and hedges. However, sometimes overgrown gardens and vegetation can be more than lawn vanity with many unaware of the electrical hazards in their yards. In fact, new BC Hydro data shows during the spring there is typically an increase in ‘backyard logging’ incidents, with many taking trimmers into their own hands to scale back neighbour’s unruly vegetation—which can be dangerous if close to electrical equipment.

Highlights

- With spring in full swing, many British Columbians are getting outside, doing more yardwork—and getting more annoyed by their neighbours in the process.
- A new survey¹ conducted on behalf of BC Hydro finds most (56%) British Columbians said at least one of their neighbours has done something to annoy or inconvenience them, and disputes about overgrown trees, hedges, gardens, and lawn décor are common in the spring and summer.
- Other common neighbour annoyances include noise (65%), parking (34%), not respecting property boundaries (23%) and ugly décor on a balcony or yard (12%).
- Data from BC Hydro also shows public ‘backyard logging’ incidents involving power lines and electrical equipment rise in the spring when British Columbians get outside more.
- In fact, already this year there have been a few backyard logging close calls with electricity reported, and the number of incidents is likely much higher because most go unreported.
- The most common backyard electrical incidents involve tree trimming—with branches falling on power lines causing power outages in many cases.
- And many have problems with their neighbours’ lack of vegetation maintenance—over 20% said they have noticed their neighbours’ trees or bushes are overgrown, and of those 22% said they are growing into or too close to power lines or electrical equipment.
- Of those who noticed their neighbours’ trees or bushes are too close to electrical lines/equipment, most (57%) asked their neighbours to do something about it and almost half of those neighbours acted to fix the problem (48%).
- For the 52% whose neighbours did not address the dangers, 18% reported it to their strata, 27% reported to ‘proper authorities,’ and 27% went ahead and trimmed the vegetation themselves.
- Taking on trimming vegetation can be dangerous, as 4% said they have had a close call or contacted electrical equipment and 71% are unaware of the basic vital safety rules for performing work in their yards near electrical equipment—which likely increases the chance of serious injury.

Solutions

While BC Hydro cannot fix most neighbour disputes, it is urging the public to make safety around power lines a priority, especially as the weather heats up and British Columbians spend more time outdoors. BC Hydro suggests British Columbians keep in mind the following while working in their yard:

¹ Online survey conducted by Majid Khoury of 800 British Columbians from Feb 23 to 27, 2023 margin of error 3.46%.

- To trim or not to trim: Customers should call a Certified Utility Arborist for any vegetation near transmission or distribution lines, or for vegetation within three metres of the service line to their home. There are several vegetation contractors that can provide assistance to homeowners to access and safely prune vegetation near BC Hydro wires. How to distinguish a line:
 - Overhead distribution lines consist of wires that are supported by utility poles about 10 metres high. These poles are most often made of wood but are sometimes concrete.
 - Transmission lines carry large quantities of electricity from generating stations to the cities where the electricity is used. Transmission lines are thick and attached to tall steel structures. There are also wooden poles that hold up transmission lines that can sometimes look like the ones that support distribution lines, but they are higher.
 - Service lines are a bundle of electrical wires or cables run from BC Hydro's power pole to the connection at your house. Because the lines are higher than your home, the cables that go to your home often drop, descending from a higher spot to a lower spot. If your home does not have a service drop, it is supplied by similar cables running underground.
- Call or click before you dig: If planting, plan and remember to always call or click BC1. Call at least three days before digging to locate any underground electrical or other infrastructure. Make a request online at **bc1c.ca** or call **604 257 1940**, **1 800 474 6886** outside the Lower Mainland.

Beautiful day in the neighbourhood

With spring in full bloom, many British Columbians are getting outside to do more gardening or yardwork, and for some this means more annoying encounters with their neighbours.

A new survey conducted on behalf of BC Hydro finds over half (56%) of British Columbians said at least one of their neighbours has done something to annoy or inconvenience them, and disputes about overgrown trees, hedges, gardens, and lawn décor are common in the spring and summer. However, sometimes overgrown gardens and vegetation can cause more than cosmetic issues, with many unaware of the electrical hazards in their yards near trees and other vegetation. In fact, BC Hydro data shows during the spring there is typically an increase in 'backyard logging' incidents, with many taking trimmers into their own hands to scale back not only their own, but their neighbours' unruly vegetation—which can be dangerous if close to electrical equipment.

WE ASKED BRITISH COLUMBIANS—DO YOUR NEIGHBOURS ANNOY YOU?



Yes
56%

No
43%

Don't have any
1%

Backyard logging incidents increase in spring

Data from BC Hydro shows public 'backyard logging' incidents involving power lines and electrical equipment rise in the spring when British Columbians get outside more. A backyard logger is a term to describe homeowners who trim trees, hedges and do other DIY projects in their yard.

Already this spring there have been a handful of backyard logging close calls with electricity reported and the number of incidents is likely much higher because most go unreported. The most common backyard electrical incidents involve tree trimming—with branches falling on power lines causing power outages in many cases. Other activities such as cleaning gutters, gardening, or making roof repairs can also mean being in dangerous proximity to power lines or other electrical equipment.



Weekend logger incidents reported to BC Hydro this year

A residential customer was cutting tree branches near a powerline. One branch made contact with the line, and a BC Hydro crew was dispatched to make the site safe. Thankfully, no one was injured. – March 15, 2023

A BC Hydro crew was called to a customer's home because of a power outage. They found the customer had been trimming a tree that fell on the line, causing the outage. Crews restored power and luckily no one was hurt. – February 20, 2023

Trimming trouble

Many British Columbians have issues with their neighbours. Of the 56% who reported having a disagreement or annoyance with at least one of their neighbours, noise (from kids, music etc.) was the most common complaint (65%), followed by parking disagreements (34%), and not respecting property boundaries (23%). Lack of maintenance of a lawn or garden is common too (infrequent mowing, etc. 16%), especially in Northern B.C (25%). Ugly décor on a condo balcony or in a yard was also a fairly common complaint (12%), as well as garbage and recycling problems (12%).

The top complaint outdoors, however, is neighbours failing to take care of their trees or vegetation. Over 20% said they have noticed their neighbours' trees or bushes are overgrown, and of those 22% said they are growing into or too close to power lines or electrical equipment.

Of those who noticed their neighbours' trees or bushes are too close to electrical lines/equipment, most (57%) asked their neighbours to do something about it and almost half of those neighbours acted to fix the problem (48%).

For the 52% whose neighbours did not address the dangers, 18% reported it to their strata, 27% reported to 'proper authorities,' and 27% went ahead and trimmed the vegetation themselves.

TOP NEIGHBOUR COMPLAINTS



65%
Noise



34%
Parking



23%
Not respecting
property boundaries



20%
Overgrown
trees or bushes



16%
Lack of lawn or
garden maintenance



12%
Ugly balcony
or lawn décor



12%
Garbage/recycling
issues

Falling into the knowledge gap

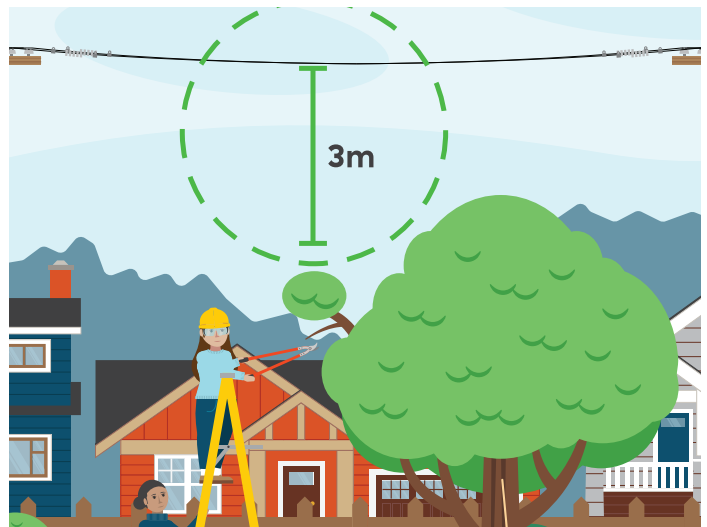
Taking on trimming vegetation oneself can be dangerous, especially when there is a lack of knowledge about how far to stay back from overhead lines and electrical equipment. A knowledge gap exists for 71% of British Columbians who could not identify the proper distance to keep themselves and tools away from overhead lines and are unaware of the safety rules for performing work in their yards near electrical equipment, which increases the likelihood of injury or near miss. In fact, 4% said they have had a close call or contacted electrical equipment in their yard. Many are also not aware of who to call if they have vegetation growing into or close to overhead electrical lines or equipment.

People and any tools being used including ladders, need to be at least three metres from power lines when pruning trees or doing other work in and around homes. A tool does not need to be touching a power line directly to be dangerous. In fact, the electricity voltage from the pole-to-pole distribution lines in B.C. neighbourhoods is capable of “arcing” or jumping to persons or objects—including tools—that come within three metres of the power line.

BC Hydro has communicated widely in recent years that the public must stay at least 10 metres away—at least the length of a bus—from a downed, sagging, or damaged power line. The 3-metre rule applies to undamaged distribution power lines—those BC Hydro power lines in neighbourhoods that run from pole to pole and carry enough voltage to arc to persons or materials, even if there is no contact.

What BC Hydro is doing

For trees that are near distribution power lines—the higher-voltage lines that stretch between BC Hydro poles—BC Hydro uses certified arborists who are qualified to work close to energized lines and are trained in proper pruning techniques. BC Hydro’s hazard tree program is aimed at preventing trees and branches from falling on transmission and distribution power lines. Trees identified as too tall, dead, or dying, diseased, unstable, or with damaged root systems, are often removed.



Staying safe

While BC Hydro cannot fix most neighbour disputes, it is urging the public to make safety around power lines a priority, especially as the weather heats up and British Columbians spend more time outdoors.

British Columbian property owners are responsible for keeping the service wires on their properties—the twisted lines that run from the BC Hydro pole to their homes—clear of vegetation. It is vital that British Columbians follow safe distance rules by keeping persons, equipment, and all parts of a tree at least three metres away from power lines. Customers should call a Certified Utility Arborist for any vegetation near transmission or distribution lines, or for vegetation within three metres of the service line to their home. There are several vegetation contractors that can provide assistance to homeowners to access and safely prune vegetation near BC Hydro wires. Overhead distribution lines consist of wires that are supported by utility poles about 10 metres high. These poles are most often made of wood but are sometimes concrete.

Transmission lines carry large quantities of electricity from generating stations to the cities where the electricity is used. Transmission lines are thick, and attached to tall steel structures. There are also wooden poles that hold up transmission lines that can sometimes look like the ones that support distribution lines, but they are higher.

Service lines are a bundle of electrical wires or cables run from BC Hydro's power pole to the connection at your house. Because the lines are higher than your home, the cables that go to your home often drop, descending from a higher spot to a lower spot. If your home does not have a service drop, it is supplied by similar cables running underground.

If planting in your yard or garden, plan ahead and remember to always call or click BC1 Call at least three days before digging to locate any underground electrical or other infrastructure. Make a request online at **bc1c.ca** or call **604 257 1940, 1 800 474 6886** outside the Lower Mainland.

For more information visit **bchydro.com**.

