

SecurPLACE™

Trimming Trees and Managing Loss

What is the value of landscaping at an apartment complex? You try to maintain your grounds in a way that says, this is a beautiful place to live. Landscape is part of the “curb appeal” that brings prospective tenants to the office for their site visit. The value is *attractiveness*. With well groomed trees, bushes, shrubs and flower beds say “we take care of our property.” You want prospects to think that what they see in your landscaping is reflective of the way you manage their apartments as well.



If you are diligent about your pruning, shaping, mowing and trimming, then where do you have loss control issues? One problem is *visibility!* As well groomed as our landscape may be, it is critical to keep in mind a couple of key elements for managing landscape as a loss control strategy.

Our grounds keeping strategy should include ensuring visibility, safety and proper illumination. Trees should be cut in a manner that allows pedestrians and motorists to see clearly any approaching vehicles or other pedestrians. Trees should also not block the view of driveways, handicap-cut curbs, or posted signage or lighting. Well placed signs announce our visitor policies, our rules for speed limits, cautions about children playing, codes about parking in fire lanes, and how we address trespass. When trees are cut too low, or are placed in front of signs, they reduce the effective of our advisories and our warnings. When shrubs are allowed to grow too tall, even if shaped nicely, they create shadows and opportunities for hiding. They do not allow our tenants to feel “comfortable” as they approach their homes.

Trees that stand in front of our buildings accentuate the architecture, and cool the outside of the structure, but they may also block building mounted light fixtures. Light inspections should be done at night to ensure functionality, but also to reveal any light blockage that occurs as a result of dense or obstructive foliage. Ensure that trees are groomed in a way that eliminates shadows and allows for unobstructed lighting. Trees should also be cut high enough from ground level that a person six feet tall can see unobstructed to sidewalks, drives, porch approaches and parking lots. If low hanging branches block the view, they serve as opportunities for misadventure. Cut trees high from the ground, away from buildings and porches, and away from the illumination array of outdoor light fixtures.

Another problem area is *injury*. Typically we see arborvitae trees planted along property lines and alongside tall wall structures. They make excellent boundary delineators, enhance architectural lines and provide a semblance of calm and privacy. But arborvitae trees are susceptible to too much water. The roots shrink quickly and the root ball can become unstable. Because of their bulk, they tend to lean when their roots become short and they are unable to sustain their weight. As the wind blows, the arborvitae rocks gently back and forth, usually resulting in an uprooting. When that occurs we can expect fence line damage or potential damage to neighboring property. Trees that fall inward from our property line can damage our own structures and represent hazards to children who like to play in fallen trees and branches. Remove fallen trees and branch debris immediately or rope off affected areas until removal can occur. Ensure that landscaping and grounds keeping practices examine drainage and the effect of watering and rain run-off on the roots of arborvitae. Run excess water away from the trees and manage water flow according to the need of the trees. Trees that tend to bulk on one side will also be susceptible to uprooting. Trim out excess bulk in the trees every few years as well. Whether an arborvitae or an oak, remove or isolate fallen trees and branches to avoid injury to our residents and other invitees.

Fall is an especially good time to examine lawn edging. If water is accumulating on sidewalks after a good rain, then we likely do not have proper water flow along lawn edging. Water that puddles on sidewalks, curb lines and roadways today represents ice pockets in the coming winter months. Take advantage of good lawn edging practices to ensure that melting ice and snow will not turn to icy walks and roads this winter.

Spend time with your in-house landscape crews to explain their role in loss reduction. Make sure you clearly explain your sound grounds keeping and landscaping practices. Meet with your contract landscapers to not only discuss your expectations about trimming trees up and bushes low, but explain it from a loss control perspective. That way they learn that you are focusing on good business practices as a loss control measure, and that they and their services are part of your plan.

To summarize, use your good landscaping practices to remove exposure to assaults, trips and falls, other injuries and property damage. Simple techniques such as good landscape practices help to control loss, manage costs and help to ensure that your property is a *SecurPlace*.