

H-7086 SUB A

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT FOR ELECTRIC SYSTEM RELIABILITY

LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY

- Establishes a transparent regulatory process through which the electric distribution company may propose a holistic, statewide approach to utility vegetation management.
- Strengthens grid reliability in the face of climate change & more frequent/intense storm events.
- Will reduce power outages, strengthen reliability, reduce long-term system costs, and enhance public & worker safety through a more equitable, statewide approach.
- Integrates expertise of municipal tree wardens, industry best practices, and national standards.
- Includes development of an educational “Right Tree, Right Place” program to inform safe, future plantings near utility infrastructure.
- Maintains statutory compliance with state arborist licensing requirements.
- Requires property owner permission to remove dead/diseased trees threatening power grid.
- Mandates notification process for property owners and municipalities prior to utility trimming.
- Vegetation standards to receive thorough oversight & require approval by state utility regulators.
- Supported by Greater Providence & Northern Chambers of Commerce; RI Manufacturers Association; Quonset Development Corp.; Farm Bureau; EMA; DEM; & DOT.



BACKGROUND

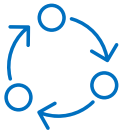
- Tree-related damage is #1 cause of power outages in RI and Northeast; this reality is heightened with more frequent & intense weather events spurred by climate change.
- Grid operators are seeing these impacts even on “blue sky” days as climate change fosters new pests & fungi destroying local vegetation (e.g., emerald ash borer infestation).
- Electric reliability is vital to our economy and public health/safety – this is especially true as RI becomes increasingly dependent on the grid to meet heating and transportation demands under the Act on Climate.
- We are asking more of the grid than ever before; our clean energy transformation requires a safe, reliable, and affordable platform to securely power Rhode Island’s green economy and future.
- Today’s fragmented, town-by-town approach to maintaining grid reliability across RI’s network of 6,200 miles of distribution lines (and 38 communities) is inequitable, inefficient, and costly.



Rhode Islanders deserve a proactive, equitable approach toward utility vegetation management to secure a safe, reliable, and affordable energy future.

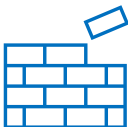
The Process (at least once every four years):

- RIE and Municipal Tree Wardens meet to discuss the type of work to be completed, identify collaborative strategies to address emerging threats to vegetation and protect desirable trees, and consider other issues relevant to vegetation management and protection of electric distribution system infrastructure.
- RIE develops draft utility vegetation management standards & practices, with consideration given to industry best practices and national standards.
- RIE presents draft standards to municipal tree wardens for feedback, inc. 30-days for written comment.
- RIE finalizes proposed vegetation management standards and practices, and files with state regulators (DPUC).
- RIE posts its proposal on its website and sends notice to municipalities and tree wardens.
- DPUC conducts review to ensure proposed standards comply with industry standards, account for impacts of climate change, and facilitate operation of a safe and reliable electric grid.
- DPUC accepts public comment for at least 30 days.
- DPUC may approve, approve with modifications, or deny.
- If approved, RIE may implement its standards across its service territory. RIE must continue to comply with local ordinances concerning public safety, roadway access, and scheduling, and give consideration to ordinances concerning local vegetation where they exist.
- Utility vegetation management standards must be updated at least once every four years to ensure cyclical input from tree wardens/public, account for evolving industry practices, and facilitate regulatory oversight.



Vegetation Management Standards & Practices Must Include...

- Specifications under various design scenarios for vegetation clearing around utility infrastructure.
- Notification process for municipalities, state agencies, and private property owners (at least 30 days in advance of trimming activity, with exclusions for public safety and storm response).
- Toll-free customer service number for questions/concerns in English and Spanish.
- For municipalities and tree wardens, a workplan detailing locations, scheduling, vendors, etc.
- An educational outreach “Right Tree, Right Place” program to inform the public on the types of vegetation that can be safely planted near utility infrastructure, with appropriate set-back distances, etc.
- Description of how RIE will comply with state arborist licensing requirements.
- A process by which RIE will seek approval from property owners for tree removal, including dead/diseased trees that pose a risk to electric system reliability.





Hopkinton, 12/17/23



Hope Valley, 12/17/23



Jamestown, 12/17/23



Tiverton, 12/17/23



Cumberland, 12/17/23



West Greenwich, 12/10/23



Coventry, 12/17/23



Woonsocket, 12/17/23



Coventry, 12/17/23