

AVOIDING CONSTRUCTION DAMAGE TO TREES

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CONSTRUCTION DAMAGE, WHAT IS IT? Any wound to the root system, the stem or main branches of a tree caused during construction could be considered construction damage. These wounds occur during or as the result of site clearing, building site preparation, soil grading, paving, building activities using heavy equipment and stock piling soil or building materials. Construction damage can occur on projects as small as paving a patio or can occur on grander scale projects such as creating a shopping mall.

WHY IS CONSTRUCTION WORK SO HARD ON TREES? Trees get into trouble when they become low on energy reserves, when their roots can't get enough oxygen or water, or when more than 40% of their root system is lost. Most construction damage happens to the root system. Developing a site is seldom possible without hurting tree roots to some extent. Roots are one of the most vital parts of the tree, responsible for nutrient, oxygen and water uptake and anchoring the tree in the soil. In addition, energy-rich chemicals are stored in the roots. Trees draw on these energy reserves to get them through emergencies like drought, defoliation, insect attack or construction damage.

PREVENTION IS THE KEY. Nearly everyone recognizes the value of trees in providing shade, or ornamentation and protection. All too frequently, the trees that make a site attractive are damaged or killed during construction by inadequate protection or carelessness. Sometimes it is possible to remedy the situation, but it is always better and more economical to prevent damage than to remedy it.

AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION. Plan: Formulate a plan. Select which trees can be saved and which trees should be removed. Try to save islands of trees rather than individuals. Talk about your plans with contractors/workers. Make a map so plans are clear to everyone. Fence off areas to be protected. Post signs that say "off limits". Water trees regularly before, during and after construction activities. Monitor the site for signs of tree damage.

Timing: Cut trees down during the fall and winter because the "saved" trees are extremely vulnerable to wounding during the spring. Use chain saws to fell trees near the trees you want saved. Avoid felling trees INTO the trees you want saved. Avoid pushing trees over with bulldozers, because it rips up neighboring trees' roots.