Line Clearing: How utilities keep your electric utility service safe & reliable

Updated: 02/12/2024



What is line clearing?

Line clearing is when a utility clears vegetation near electric utility lines. This reduces outages and improves system safety and reliability. Line clearing includes the following:

- Tree trimming.
- Other means of controlling vegetation such as herbicide treatment.

Does line clearing include stump removal?

No. Stump removal is not a common utility practice.

Why is line clearing important?

Tree contact with electric lines is the leading cause of power outages for most utilities in the state. It often results in downed power lines.

Clearing rights-of-way allows the utility better access to its electric lines. This allows them to assess damages and restore power more quickly in case of a storm.

Do all utilities have line-clearing programs?

The MPSC requires each investor-owned electric utility and cooperative electric utility to adopt a line-clearing program. These line-clearing programs use industry-recognized guidelines.

What is the line-clearing process?

The line-clearing process outlined below is common for most routine maintenance work performed by electric utilities in Michigan. However, it may not reflect all electric utilities across the state.

You can find electric utility contact information on the MPSC website.

	Process	What does the utility do?
Step 1	Pre-Trim Notification	Notifies customers and residents in the line-clearing territory prior to starting work.
Step 2	Line-Clearing Work	Clears vegetation within the utility right-of-way. Some utility line-clearing programs also target hazard (dead or diseased) trees outside of the right-of-way that are a threat to the infrastructure.
Step 3	Clean-up Work	Mulches or removes smaller vegetation, such as leaves and smaller limbs, and leaves stacks of larger wood pieces where they perform the line-clearing work. The utility may cut stumps near ground-level and treat them with herbicide to prevent future growth.

MPSC
MICHIGAN PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION
P.O. Box 30221, Lansing, MI 48909
www.michigan.gov/mpsc
800-292-9555

Michigan.gov/VOTE