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# MIOSHA

General Industry Safety and Health Division (GISHD)  
Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA)  
Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity (LEO)

## DIVISION INSTRUCTION

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GISHD-COM-16-1R3

DATE:  
July 10, 2024

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**SUBJECT: Tree Trimming Operations**

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- I. Purpose. This instruction establishes policies and procedures for inspections of tree trimming operations.
- II. Scope. This instruction applies division wide.
- III. References.
  - A. Agency Instruction MIOSHA-COM-20-1, Companion and Expanded Inspections.
  - B. General Industry Standard Part 53, [Tree Trimming and Removal](#) (Part 53).
  - C. General Industry Standard Part 86, [Electric Power Generation, Transmission, and Distribution](#) (Part 86).
  - D. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Memorandum, [Request for Interpretation of OSHA Standard](#), 29 CFR 1910.269, April 26, 1999.
- IV. Distribution. MIOSHA Staff; Federal OSHA; S-drive Accessible; Internet Accessible; and MIOSHA Messenger.
- V. Cancellations. All previous versions of this division instruction.
- VI. Next Review Date. To be reviewed three (3) years from date of issuance.
- VII. History. History of previous versions include:
  - GISHD-COM-16-1R2, June 9, 2021
  - GISHD-COM-16-1R1, February 15, 2017
  - GISHD-COM-16-1, July 7, 2016
  - GISHD-MEMO-ADM-07-3, June 22, 2007
- VIII. Contact. [Adrian Z. Rocskay](#), Division Director
- IX. Originator: Adrian Z. Rocskay
- X. Significant Changes.
  - A. Added language to more clearly distinguish Part 86 requirements for qualified versus non-qualified employees. See Section XI. A.
  - B. Added requirement to put supervisory approval for self-initiated inspections on the case file diary sheet. See Section XII. A. 5.
  - C. Added Agency Instruction MIOSHA-COM-20-1, Companion and Expanded Inspections as guidance. See Section XIII. A.

- XI. Application of Part 53 and Part 86 to Line-Clearance Tree-Trimming Operations.
  - A. In accordance with the OSHA Memorandum on 29 CFR 1910.269, the provisions of Part 86 (which is an adoption of 29 CFR 1910.269) applicable to line-clearance tree-trimming operations are as follows:
    - 1. Qualified Employee. All of 29 CFR 1910.269 except paragraph (r)(1) applies to line-clearance tree-trimming operations performed by qualified employees (those who are knowledgeable in the construction and operation of electric power generation, transmission, or distribution equipment involved, along with the associated hazards). These employees typically perform tree-trimming duties as an incidental part of their normal work activities. The full definition of “qualified employee” is found in 1910.269(x).
    - 2. Not a Qualified Employee. Paragraphs 1910.269(a)(2), 1910.269(b), 1910.269(c), 1910.269(g), 1910.269(k), 1910.269(p), and 1910.269(r) apply to line-clearance tree-trimming operations performed by line-clearance tree-trimmers who are not qualified employees. MIOSHA has adopted special electrical safety-related work practice provisions for line-clearance tree trimmers that are more stringent than those that apply to qualified employees. These provisions are contained in paragraph 1910.269(r)(1) and include certain minimum approach distances. Paragraphs 1910.269(a)(2), 1910.269(b), 1910.269(c), 1910.269(g), 1910.269(k), and 1910.269(p) are general requirements addressing training, medical services, first aid, job briefing, personal protective equipment (PPE), material handling, and mechanical equipment, respectively.
  - B. The safety officer (SO) will use the following criteria to determine when Part 53 or Part 86 applies:
    - 1. When a utility company employee is performing a line-clearance tree-trimming operation or if employees are working under contract for a utility company to perform a line-clearance tree-trimming operation, Part 86 will apply.
    - 2. When an employee is performing other types of tree-trimming activity such as tree removal or landscaping near power lines, Part 53, Rule 5321 will apply.
- XII. Self-Initiated Inspections.
  - A. A SO may self-initiate an inspection of a tree trimming operation after supervisory approval. The allowance for self-initiation is the SO observing a serious violation while in transit, or less typically, when conducting another inspection. The SO will:
    - 1. Not compromise their own safety while driving in order to observe a tree trimming operation. Distracted driving is a leading cause of traffic

accidents. When the SO sees a tree trimming operation that may be problematic, the SO will pull safely off the road and only scrutinize the operation once parked.

2. Observe the tree trimming operation briefly, discreetly, and from a distance but in a location that offers a good view of the activities.
3. If no serious violations are detected, move on. A list of serious hazards is provided below in section XII. B.
4. If at least one serious violation is observed, attempt to photograph the violation from a distance.
5. Call their supervisor to obtain permission to open the inspection. If the supervisor is unavailable, ask to speak to their manager or any other available supervisor or manager. This may include pulling the supervisor or manager from a meeting due to the urgent nature of the request. Add an entry on the case file diary sheet with the date the supervisor/manager was contacted for approval to open.
6. When permitted, proceed with opening an inspection after donning appropriate PPE, such as safety glasses, earplugs, high-visibility vest, and hardhat.
7. Observe the roadway for hazards, activate and place their yellow flasher on their vehicle, and then safely approach the work area.
8. Introduce themselves and explain the purpose of the inspection (prevention of fatalities in tree trimming) and then conduct an opening conference.
9. Inquire about the reason for the work being conducted. Limb or tree clearance for construction is outside of general industry jurisdiction. Limb or tree clearance related to power line clearance will be covered under Part 86. All other tree trimming violations will be addressed under Part 53.
10. Send a short email notification to their supervisor by the end of the day indicating whether the inspection has been opened or not.

B. The SO will observe for the following serious violations:

1. An employee lacking proper PPE, such as hard hats, safety glasses, and next to roadways, high-visibility vests.
2. Missing or inadequate signs on the road warning approaching vehicles of the roadside tree-trimming operations ahead.
3. An employee aloft in a tree without proper fall protection.
4. An employee in the bucket of an aerial lift without fall protection or not anchored or tied off to the bucket.
5. An employee working too close to electrical wires.

6. An employee standing under, in the path of, or in close proximity to limb cutting, limb dropping, or tree felling.
  7. Inadequate guarding on the woodchipper.
  8. Any other violation of Part 53 that could result in a serious injury or fatality – for example, a poor limb or tree felling procedure that could cause an employee to fall from a tree or an employee to be struck by falling trees or limbs, electrical hazards, or a work practice that could result in an employee being pulled into the chipper.
- C. OSHA Information System Coding. The SO will code the inspection as “Unprogrammed Other” on the Inspection tab in the Inspection Type subtab in the Initiating Type field.

XIII. Other Considerations.

- A. If the SO is inspecting a county road commission, department of public works, or local park and recreation department, the SO will ask if any tree trimming is currently being performed. If yes, the SO will go to the location to observe the operation. The SO will determine whether to open a companion inspection or expand the scope of the original inspection in accordance with Agency Instruction MIOSHA-COM-20-1, Companion and Expanded Inspections.
- B. After a severe storm (ice, wind) or news reports of a lot of downed trees, the SO should be especially alert for tree trimming operations on the side of the road. To find tree trimming operations, a safety supervisor may assign an SO to travel through an area reported to have downed trees. Taking back roads rather than freeways is another way to encounter more of these operations.