

BLACKPOOL COUNCIL TREE SERVICES

Why Topping Harms Trees.

What is topping? Topping is the indiscriminate cutting back of tree branches to stubs or in some cases the removal of the crown altogether.

It must not be confused with pollarding which is an accepted pruning and cultural technique initiated when the tree is young. The most common reason given for “topping” is to reduce the height of the tree and render it less hazardous or to decrease the shading effect of the tree. It is not a viable option of crown reduction and in the long term will make the tree more hazardous and more of a light nuisance than before.

Here are just a few reasons why “topping” should not be treated as an acceptable pruning method.

Topping stresses trees – topping often removes from half to all the leaf bearing crown thereby effectively removing the “food factories”, this can temporarily starve the tree. Because of this the tree triggers a survival mechanism. Otherwise latent buds are activated and the tree forces out multiple shoots beneath each cut. This is because when a tree is “topped” it needs to put out as many new leaves as possible in order to just survive. This affects the natural balance of the tree, and this new growth can become unstable when older, as the branch attachments are not as strong as normal branch systems.

Topping can cause root death and disease - topping can cause root problems because of the sudden loss of an energy producing crown, roots will not receive adequate energy to grow and remain healthy. Consequently roots could die resulting in the tree becoming unstable.

Topping is unsightly -a topped tree looks unnatural, it loses all its natural grace and shape

Topping promotes Decay – decay enters the tree through large pruning wounds caused by indiscriminate pruning. The tree could become extremely hazardous in the future.

So please think carefully when asking for a tree to be pruned, there are alternative pruning practices which could be carried out.

If in doubt consult your local arboricultural officer. Phil Morton 01253 476343 or on phil.morton@blackpool.gov.uk

