

# Indiana Tree Alliance

## Working to end abusive tree trimming by electric utilities

In the last century, electric service in homes and businesses has evolved from near miracle to necessity. In less than the last 100 years, the population of the United States has tripled, while technological advances-heavily dependant on electric power-have exploded.

The challenge of generating and transmitting adequate safe and reliable electric power has brought with it some undesirable consequences, such as air pollution and the potential for radioactive contamination.

The Indiana Tree Alliance emerged from a more local and personal perspective--individual property owners angered by damage to trees on their property, or in their communities.

Following are matters involving unnecessary or illegal practices we have identified:

1. Private property is not respected. Some utilities feel they have the right to trim or remove trees from private property without permission, compensation or apology.  
The practice of placing power poles close to Right of Way lines forces tree cutting on/over private property.
2. Cutting distance standards common to all utilities do not exist. Utilities are largely allowed to develop their own standards, which are subject to the financial self-interests of the utilities, sometimes to the detriment of property owners.
3. Utilities' inability to adequately control sub-contractors is evident, and accountability is not a priority.
4. Evidence of too much common spirit between the Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission and the utilities it is supposed to regulate. This issue is currently under examination
5. Upgrades of line voltage being made without notification to property owners, approval of any other authority or consideration of additional easement necessary for new clearance requirement. Poles near ROW lines can now require trimming/clearing up to 60' onto private property. (See attached cutting distance charts used by IPL.)

Now following are corrective measures we are pursuing:

1. A statewide investigation of tree trimming procedures, practices and tariff language is underway. It was initiated by a complaint petition filed on behalf of individual property owners, and the order of Sen. Jim Merritt, chairman of the Senate Utility Committee. The outcome of this investigation will determine where legislative changes are appropriate.
2. The development of standards for vegetation management by electric utilities, including determination of what maximum cutting distances are necessary.
3. Legislation empowering the IURC, and the Office of Utility Consumer Counselor, to hear complaint cases of tree and property damage, and to award damages, when justified.
4. A determination, and clarification of what transmission lines fall under the jurisdiction of FERC, and what effect that has on cutting distances.
5. Legislative transfer of authority for new line route approval from the utilities to the IURC.
6. An open, detailed study, required by the IURC, to examine the true relative costs-over an extended time frame-of line burying versus suspension.

Signed Jerry Baker, Charlie Goodman Indiana Tree Alliance