

Novy, Felicity (TFS)

From: Gail Foster <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Sunday, 8 July 2018 4:07 PM
To: Fire Service Act Review (TFS)
Subject: FW: Road safety policy
Attachments: tree letter.docx; Trees.docx; Council trees.docx

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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From: Gail Foster [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, 8 July 2018 4:05 PM
To: 'Act.Review@fire.tas.gov.au.'
Subject: FW: Road safety policy

Dear Dr Felicity Novy

Fire Service Act Review - Safety of road verges.

Please find attached :

- Copy of a letter published by Kingborough Chronicle after resident died from falling tree
- Letter re local tree removal
- General information on trees and safety – (previously sent to Vince Taskunas – RACT)

I have a number of friends who work as volunteer firefighters. They all agree that road verges should be cleared of flammable material for 20 – 30 metres. They have stated that they have been prevented from implementing this policy. I am not sure if this ideology is coming from the council or fire department.

Yours sincerely,

Gail Foster

Gail Foster
[REDACTED]

Author of:
Six Months in Wonderland
The Question Space - Tools to aid Recovery from Workplace and other Bullying
The Victory Garden – A sequel to Six Months in Wonderland - ebook
Hints and Tips from The Victory Garden – Frugality with flair - ebook

"Wonderland is a place and also an attitude - an attitude of hope, love and humour."

Letter written to the Kingborough Chronicle 2014 after resident died from falling tree.

I agree whole heartedly with the opinions expressed in the Chronicle of March 4, regarding trees along road verges. No, Ross Chopping, you are not alone!

Other recent fatalities are; - A tree killed a 4 year old child and severely injured her mother in a park in Bendigo Dec 31 2013. The tree had been checked and declared safe.

An 8 year old girl died and a teacher and another child severely injured after a branch of a large gum tree fell in the school playground at Pitt Town School, Sydney, in February, 2014. This tree had also been recently inspected by arborists.

- Arborists are not always able to tell the condition of trees.
- ***Any tree can fall if the weather is severe enough!***

Helen Samootin rightly pointed to the fire risk that large gum and pine trees pose when allowed to grow close to roads. This is especially the case when these trees grow close to overhead power lines or when residents have only one access. **Aurora** is only able to reduce vegetation. Tree removal is the responsibility of councils. Vegetation reduction is carried out by contractors. This is only done on request. There is no ongoing checking of trees near roads and power lines. We presently have workers pruning many trees year after year that should not be there in the first place. Fire and weed retardant plants would cut down pre-season fire reduction work and reduce the likelihood of fires.

The properties of gum trees also increase fire risk. For example, Eucalypts allow light and heat to penetrate the earth as the leaves are horizontal rather than vertical. This leads to drier soil, reduced shade and higher temperatures. When eucalypts burn the rainforests do not recover as the eucalypts colonise the area leading to reduced soil moisture. Eucalypt leaves are full of oil! Gum trees create chemicals which inhibit the germination of competing plants. Their leaves do not break down and build up organic carbon.

The Kingborough Council appears to have a philosophical stance of not cutting or removing trees. We had a large, rotten gum tree close to the road in our street. The council refused to take action as "the tree was on private land"! Thankfully it has since been removed by the land owner. Our only road access is bordered by huge gum trees with branches over overhead power lines.

I strongly believe in having a voice, however knowledge comes before outrage. If those who have the professional knowledge and experience deem a tree to be unsafe, then action must be taken in spite of views by some locals. Road safety should be a priority. Where a decision is made to have a road, environmental protection, though important, is a secondary priority. I am a gardener and love trees but would never plant gum trees in my garden. I believe in **Safety First**.

When and why did trees take precedence over people?

Are some council workers unable to see the wood for the trees?

Gail Foster

Trees and Safety

Recent Accidents

- A tree killed a 4 year old child and severely injured her mother in a park in Bendigo Dec 31 2013(it had been checked and declared safe).
- 8 year old girl died and a teacher and another child severely injured after a branch of a large gum tree fell in the school playground – Pitt Town School, Sydney, February, 2014. –(not as a result of bad weather. It had also been recently inspected by arborists).
- 43 year old Margate man died when a large gum tree fell on his car. This also blocked the road for several hours. The man leaves a widow and 2 children.

Driver Safety

- Many Tasmanian roads have gum and pine trees growing within falling distance of roads.
- Road verges are not inspected for safety. The pruning of vegetation is carried out after request.
- Gum trees fall without sound or warning – called ‘widow makers’ for a reason.
- Large trees kill on impact. They may crush or the impact may cause a neck fracture.
- Other cars(and pedestrians) may also be involved due to necessity of braking suddenly.
- May impact on line of sight.

Fire Safety

Fallen trees prevent access to safety in the event of a fire.

The properties of eucalypts increase fire danger – see below.

Eucalypts - Properties

- Fall suddenly without noise or warning – often on a still day.
- *Mature Eucalypts and other trees (see Journal of Arboriculture, April, 1983 – “Summer Branch Drop” by Richard Harris) shed limbs after a period of drought or after a storm which terminates drought. ***This becomes more prevalent as trees age.*** This also applies to pine trees, many of which line our roads. “No outward appearance has been associated with impending branch failure.” Richard Harris
- Highly flammable – high oil content.
- Useful for – wood, firewood and oil
- Not suitable for road verges, parks, schools or suburban gardens.

Notes from ‘Beyond eucalypts’ and ‘Planting oaks instead of gums’ by Clive Blazey, founder and Chairman of The Diggers Club.

Eucalypts allow light and heat to penetrate the earth as the leaves are horizontal rather than vertical. This leads to drier soil, reduced shade and higher temperatures.

When eucalypts burn the rainforests do not recover as the eucalypts colonise the area leading to reduced soil moisture.

Eucalypt leaves are full of oil!

Gum trees create chemicals which inhibit the germination of competing plants. Their leaves do not break down and build up organic carbon.

There are many fire retardant trees that may be used to protect gardens. English oaks have been found to be important homestead protectors. They provide shade, are drought tolerant and are as fast growing as eucalypts.

Summary

This leads to hot, dry, poor soil, reduced shade, higher temperatures and high flammability.

Challenges

Aurora - only able to reduce vegetation. Tree removal is the responsibility of councils.

Vegetation reduction is carried out by contractors. This is only done on request. There is no ongoing checking of trees near roads and power lines.

Councils – Our local council (Kingborough) appears to have a philosophical stance of not cutting or removing trees. We had a large, rotten gum tree close to the road in our street. The council refused to take action as “the tree was on private land”! Thankfully it has since been removed by the land owner.

When and why did trees take precedence over people?

I am a gardener and love trees but would never plant gum trees in my garden. I believe in **Safety First**.

Environmental Department I have been informed that some workers in this department are unable, literally to see the wood from the trees. In other words, they are focusing narrowly on their environmental duties eg trees, birds without seeing the big picture, which is how their decisions will affect residents.

Local Groups

*I have been told by locals that DIER wished to remove the trees at Margate (which caused fatal accident) 15 years ago. However they reversed this decision due to strong outrage and campaign by local residents. I have been reliably informed that the outrage was over the trees being a habitat for the pardalote bird species.

I strongly believe in having a voice (which is why I am taking considerable time and mental energy out of my day to write this) however knowledge comes before outrage. If those who have the professional knowledge and experience deem a tree to be unsafe, then action must be taken in spite of views by some locals. Road safety should be a priority. Where a decision is made to have a road, environmental protection, though important, is a secondary priority.

Arborist inspections

Arborists are not always able to tell the condition of trees. The tree that killed a 4 year old child and severely injured her mother in Bendigo Dec 31 2013 had been checked and declared safe.

An 8 year old girl died and a teacher and another child severely injured after a branch of a large gum tree which had recently been inspected by arborists fell in the school playground – Pitt Town School, Sydney, February, 2014. This was not as a result of bad weather.

Any tree can fall if the weather is severe enough!

Suggestions

Gum and pine trees not grown on road verges, parks, schools and suburban gardens.

Regular checks and maintenance of these areas.

Alternatives for road verges – Hedgerows - Fire retardant plants. There are many trees which are fire retardant and small enough not to cause injury.

Consider line of sight, fire, road obstruction.

Set up a tree reporting system which citizens could easily access. Many people do not like speaking or waiting on the phone – suggest email.

We presently have workers pruning many trees year after year that should not be there in the first place. Fire and weed retardant plants would cut down pre-season fire reduction work and reduce the likelihood of fires.

Gail Foster

February, 2014

Gail Foster

Dear Councillor McGinnis,

Congratulations on achieving the removal of dangerous trees in Algona road and Sherburd park. The large tree in Sherburd park had been of concern to me for some time. I noted that the tree was rotting and splitting and could easily have caused injury or fatality.

I and others have concerns in regard to trees lining Sherburd Park and Brightwater road. The limbs of these large eucalypt trees often overhang the overhead powerlines. This road is our only access in the event of a fire. I contacted Aurora and was informed that they are only able to trim trees and only when informed by the public. Dangerous trees line roads throughout Tasmania and are not being checked or monitored.

We often lose power on windy days due to trees falling on power lines and have bought our own generator in order to have power during fire danger days (especially to power our water pump). On one occasion we and other residents of Sandra Drive were unable to access our properties for an entire day due to falling trees and limbs in Brightwater road.

This is just one instance of a nation wide problem. I and many others believe that road verges should be cleared of trees that present a high fall risk, such as eucalypts. I have spoken to many fire fighters who agree with this protocol but are preventing from taking action due to 'Green' policies. If 20-30 metres of every main road verge was planted with fire retardant plants, this would both reduce the likelihood of fatalities during and after severe weather events and reduce costs as the need to constantly trim trees would be removed.

People planting large eucalypts in their yards which border roads is also an area to be looked at. Apart from the danger of falling on roads, it increases the fire risk to other residents.

High fire danger days are usually accompanied by strong winds. This scenario increases the risk of tree fall which both adds fire fuel and prevents the safe evacuation of residents.

Safe clearing and planting of road verges would make employment, nation wide. Courses which provide adequate training and supervision could be set up and those already skilled could be utilised with teaching.

