

## Caution: Crooked Tree Trimmers at Work

By Cathy Tyson



Orinda residents beware; an unscrupulous tree trimming service has been active in and around Orinda. Especially after the recent storms, many residents have trees large and small strewn or dangling around their property.

Although seeming legitimate, many locals have fallen for their solicitations and their rock bottom prices. Brian Gates, Owner of Expert Tree Service, who has been in business for 30 years and is a member of the Orinda Chamber of Commerce said, "It's impossible to run a legitimate tree service for less than \$50 per man/hour. There is just no way to pay for the insurance, trucks, certification and equipment for less than that."

An illegitimate tree service might come in at \$15 to \$20 dollars per hour, but they probably don't have any workers compensation insurance or the required

Line Clearance Certificate, not to mention experience. A Line Clearance Certificate is required when working within 10 feet of any kind of power line. "The two leading causes of death among tree trimmers were electrocutions and falls," according to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. In the unfortunate event of an accident the homeowner is completely liable for injury that occurs to a worker and for all the damage caused.

"Local consumers can have such a laissez-faire attitude, knowing that they have benefits and insurance from their jobs, but when they get a substantially lower bid, it's so easy to look the other way, and forget about the huge exposure they open themselves to and lack of insurance," opined Gates.

One particular company that has five salesmen working the

area, claims zero employees on their Contractor's License, which is easily accessible from the Contractors State License Board website (see sidebar) and pays no workers compensation. It is unknown whether they are following all of the OSHA regulations relevant to tree trimming.

Caveat emptor.

What to look for when hiring a tree service:

1. Check the Contractors State License Board at [www.cslb.ca.gov](http://www.cslb.ca.gov) to get status of contractor's license, by clicking on "check a license." Towards the bottom of the Contract' License Detail page, workers compensation status is listed along with required contractor's bond.
2. Demand and save an insurance certificate from the carrier, not the service provider.
3. Make sure they have property liability insurance to protect you and workers compensation insurance for all employees to protect you and the worker.
4. Make sure they have the required Line Clearance Certificate to work around electrical conductors, power lines, guy wires and telephone poles.
5. Make sure they have a Certified Arborist on staff so they know when and how to trim your trees. For example, Monterey Pines trimmed in the summer months will die.
6. Make sure they wear the required safety equipment, hard hat and safety glasses.