

**Department of the Environment**  
2 Marsham Street London SW1P 3EB

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The Chief Executive	Your reference
County Councils in England	
Greater London Council	Our reference HM 23/2/001
London Borough Councils	
The Common Council of the City of London	Date 12th December, 1975.
District Councils in England	

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Dear Sir

**INSPECTION OF HIGHWAY TREES**

1. General advice on the inspection and maintenance of wayside trees and hedges is given in DOE Circular No. 90/73 which, together with a Circular to be issued later relating to trees in urban areas, replaces an earlier Circular ROADS on this subject. The timing of these inspections and the detail in which they should reasonably be carried out have presented highway engineers with some problems, and the purpose of this Circular, which replaces Circular ROADS 34/74, now cancelled, is to help in resolving them.

2. Trees growing within the highway are a most important amenity feature, but they can also present very real danger to persons using the highway. For this reason the trees should receive adequate attention to preserve healthy growth, and they should also be examined regularly for any signs of injury or decay which could lead to their becoming a hazard.

3. During the course of his work the road inspector should make a note of any obviously dead, dying dangerous trees, whether within the highway itself or within falling distance of the highway. If he finds there has been any accident or damage to a tree, that it is unstable in any way, large branches have been broken, or, if in leaf, there is any sign of wilting or die-back, then the facts should be reported to the County Engineer, who will arrange for further examination by a competent person and for any follow-up action found to be necessary.

4. In addition the County Engineer should arrange for examination of the trees by a competent person at regular intervals, preferably when they are in full leaf, in order to make sure that they are safe and are likely to present no danger to road users before the next inspection takes place. If further action is considered necessary, this should take place urgently. The period between these inspections and the degree of examination will depend on the age and history of the trees, surgery, disease, accidents, etc. It would be helpful to the examining officer if a record could be kept of any previous damage or work done etc. on wayside trees, and brought up to date at subsequent inspections. The officer should also pay attention to trees growing on private land which are within falling distance of the highway, and examine any which are suspect. The highway authority has a right of access for this purpose, and may require the owner or occupier of land on which there is any tree which is dead, diseased, damaged or insecurely rooted to be cut or felled in order to remove the likelihood of danger (Sec. 10 Highways (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1961).

5. Points which should particularly be noted during inspections are those related to general symptoms of debility. Thinning of the foliage and dying back of the branches is an indication of ill health in a tree. Trees in this state will need close inspection. Wounds where branches have been removed should be checked, as it is often through these that disease enters a tree. Areas where bark has peeled off should be examined, as they indicate dead wood beneath. Galls and cankerous lesions are a sign of fungal or bacterial disease and the presence of toadstools or brackets usually indicates an advanced state of fungal decay. Any moisture issuing from the trunk of the tree, or staining by water running down the trunk, may also indicate the presence of internal rot. When symptoms such as these have been spotted, either they should be further investigated with an auger, or the advice of a tree surgeon should be sought.

6. Regard should also be paid to works carried out by statutory undertakers near trees in the highway, and consideration given to felling if it is ascertained that so many of the roots have been severed that the tree may become unstable. Similar consideration should also be given to mature trees remaining after roadworks or statutory undertakers works have removed the protection afforded by other trees, or where the root systems have been damaged either by the works or by alterations to the soil level. Inspection should also cover the possibility of damage to footways, carriageway and street furniture by roots. As a rough guide root spread is usually about  $1\frac{1}{3}$  times height. Any damage should be reported to the County Engineer or other officer responsible.

7. Any enquiries on this Circular should be made to Room S7/16 at Marsham Street (01-212.8514) or, if of a technical nature, to Room 1385 at Thames House South, Millbank, London, SW1P 4GH (DOE Horticultural Advisers) (01-211.3538). Distribution enquiries should be made to Highways Manual Branch (01-212.4944).

Yours faithfully

J.L.Hammond  
Assistant Chief Engineer.