Guide to Tree Cutting and Pruning

Planning and Development Services Division

The Sunshine Coast Regional District (SCRD) regulates tree cutting in designated Tree Cutting Permit Areas and Development Permit Areas to help protect people, property, watercourses, and environmentally sensitive lands from hazards such as erosion, flooding, and slope failure. Tree cutting may require a permit depending on the location of your property.

It is the responsibility of property owners, property managers, property occupiers, and any contractors they hire, to ensure that they comply with the Sunshine Coast Regional District Tree Cutting Permit Bylaw No. 350 and the applicable Official Community Plan Development Permit Area.

WHAT IS "TREE CUTTING"?

Under SCRD Tree Cutting Permit Bylaw No. 350, "cutting" or "cut" means:

The cutting down, knocking down, or cutting to cause the destruction of any tree.

Be aware that improper pruning can cause the destruction of a tree.

For the purposes of the bylaw, **a tree is any woody plant 3 metres (9.84 feet) or more in height**, including trees that have previously been reduced below 3 metres through topping.

DO I NEED A TREE CUTTING PERMIT?

You can determine if your property is affected by a Tree Cutting Permit Area or Development Permit Area by downloading a Property Report from the SCRD Property Viewer at maps.scrd.ca.

- No tree cutting is permitted within Tree Cutting Permit Area A or Hazard, Environmental, and Shoreline Development Permit Areas without a permit, unless exempt.
- In Tree Cutting Permit Area B, a permit is required to remove more than three trees per parcel per calendar year (or more than three trees per hectare per year on parcels larger than one hectare), unless exempt.

EXEMPTIONS

You do not need a Tree Cutting Permit to:

- Prune or maintain trees using best practices.
- Cut or remove trees when authorized by a Development Permit.
- Remove hazard trees as determined by a Qualified Professional.

Property owners are encouraged to contact the SCRD Planning Department before undertaking tree removal work.

! Tree pruning, cutting, or removal in Riparian Assessment Areas, within 30 metres of a watercourse, always requires a Development Permit.

PRUNING AND MAINTAINING TREES

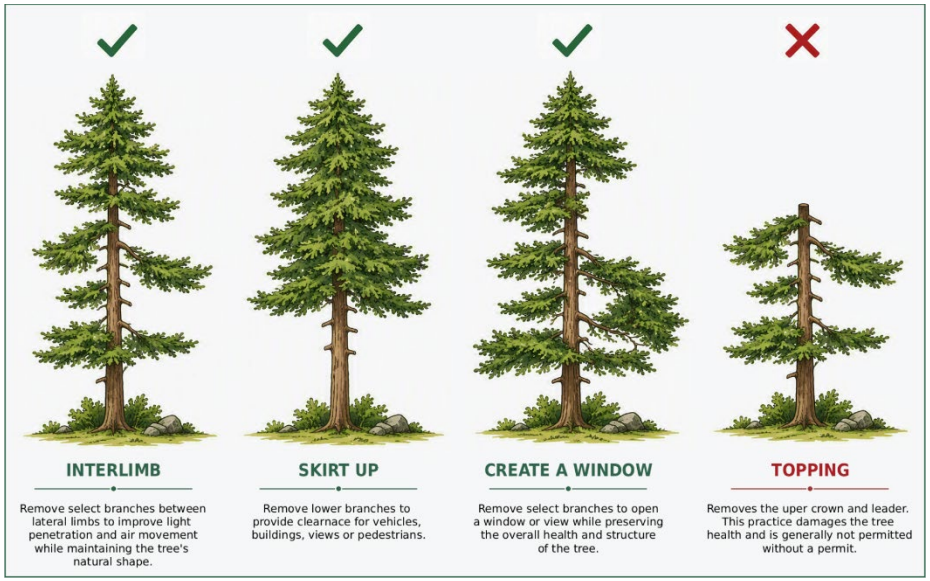
Pruning is often necessary to remove dead, diseased, damaged, or hazardous branches, improve clearance, and maintain tree structure. Proper pruning helps maintain tree health, structure, and appearance while reducing long-term risk. However, improper pruning can permanently damage a tree and reduce its lifespan.

The SCRD recommends that pruning follow industry best practices established by the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA).

Key principles include:

- Prune during the winter months before the spring growth season.
- Only remove dead, dying, diseased, or hazardous branches.
- Do not remove more than 25% of a tree's crown in a single pruning event, and less for mature trees.
- Make pruning cuts just outside the branch collar and avoid flush cuts against the trunk.
- Hazardous pruning work should be carried out by a qualified arborist.

Examples of Pruning and Tree Maintenance



TREE TOPPING

Tree topping is the indiscriminate cutting of a tree's main stem (leader) or branches back to stubs or lateral branches that are too small to assume normal growth. It is widely recognized as a harmful tree care practice that damages tree health and structural integrity and is not considered acceptable arboricultural practice.

Why is Tree Topping Discouraged?

Tree topping can:

- Reduce a tree's health, vigor, and lifespan, impair its ability to produce food and recover from stress, and contribute to tree decline or death.
- Create large wounds that increase vulnerability to disease and decay.
- Trigger the growth of weak shoots that are more likely to fail in storms.
- Increase long-term maintenance costs while permanently damaging the tree's natural form and appearance.

Because topping can seriously damage or destroy a tree, it is generally considered tree cutting under SCRD regulations and requires a permit when undertaken within designated Tree Cutting Permit Areas. Property owners considering significant crown reduction or height reduction should consult a qualified ISA Certified Arborist and contact the SCRD before proceeding.

For information on Tree Cutting Permit Areas and permit requirements, contact planning@scrd.ca.

OTHER REGULATIONS

Other regulations may affect tree cutting or limbing:

Wildlife Act

Under Section 34 of the British Columbia Wildlife Act, it is illegal to disturb, damage, or destroy an active bird nest, egg, or tree containing an active nest.

The most active bird nesting season starts on March 15 and lasts until August 15 every year.

Please note that the nests of an eagle, peregrine falcon, gyrfalcon, osprey, heron, or burrowing owl are protected under the Wildlife Act, regardless of nest activity (i.e. active or inactive).

Riparian Areas Protection Regulation

Any tree cutting, limbing, or removal within 30 metres of a watercourse requires a permit. Please contact the SCRD Planning and Development Services Division to determine if any exemptions apply.

RESOURCES

Development Applications (to make an application)

Development Permit Areas

SCRD Tree Cutting Permit Bylaw No. 350

Pruning Mature Trees (ISA)

Why Topping Hurts Trees (ISA)