

# Utility VM: Working with the Public

## Communication, Strategies, Options and Safety

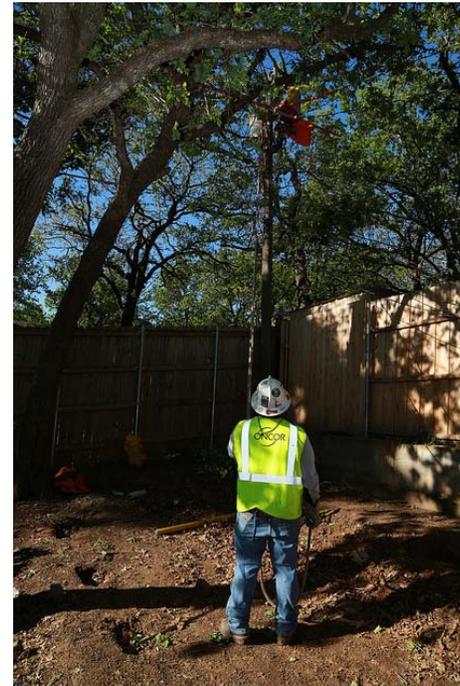
Jeff Quinters, Program Manager - Forester  
Oncor Electric Delivery

WE DELIVER.



## Have Your Ever Noticed?

- The only thing people hate more than utility tree trimming is when they have to go without power
- Often, the person calling to complain about a power outage will also complain about trees having to be trimmed to restore power



## Something to Think About

Utility vegetation management (VM) requires stepping into people's lives uninvited

We have no idea what is going on in their lives when we arrive:

- Bad day at the office
- Wedding ceremony planned in the yard
- Divorce papers served
- Death in the family
- Loss of livelihood





**“Good customer service is rare. When something is rare, it is valuable. When something is valuable, it is expensive. Bad customer service is our way of helping our customers save money!”**

## Have you ever heard of *Customer Focus*?

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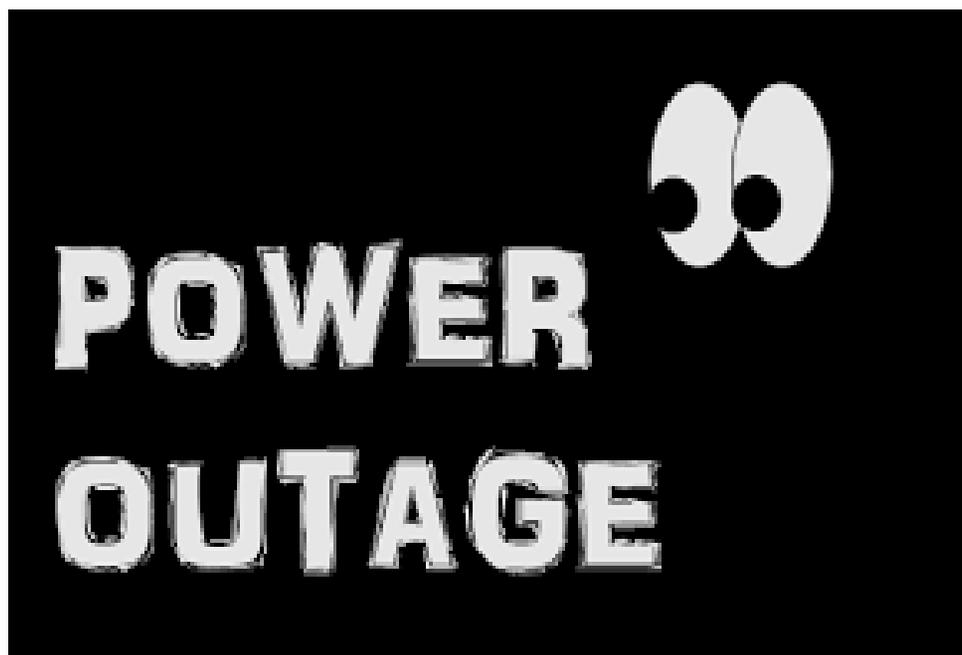
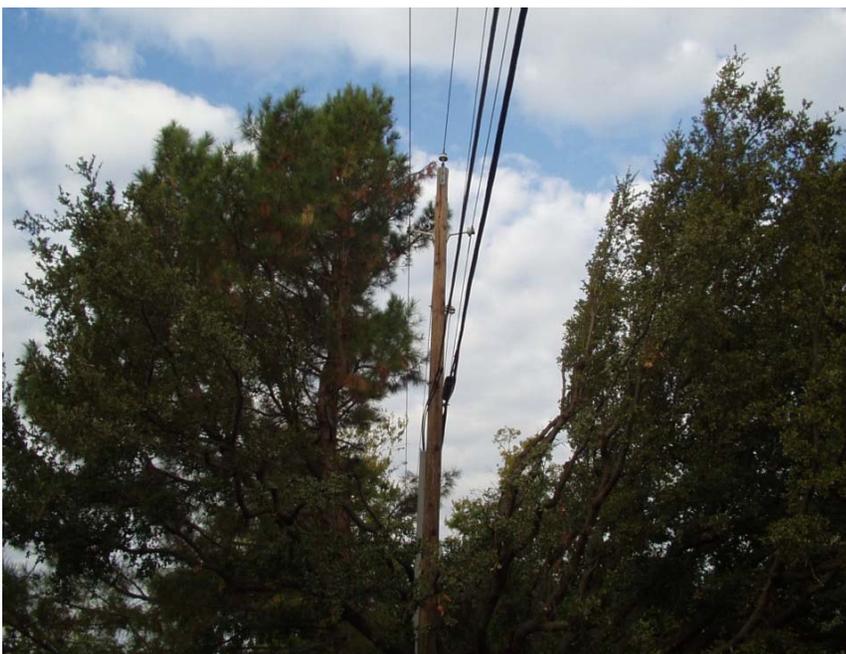
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“The orientation of an organization toward serving its clients' needs. Having a customer focus is usually a strong contributor to the overall success of a business and involves ensuring that all aspects of the company put its customers' satisfaction first.”

– Source: Business Dictionary

## Customer Focus

As a regulated utility, we cannot put one customer's satisfaction above another's.



## What is Customer Focus?

- Having an awareness of the customer's behavior and attitude AND our behavior and attitude, too
- Educating employees and contractors to ensure preparedness
- Evaluating your field personnel and contractors
- Knowing when to get assistance
- Recognizing that not everyone is suited to deal with the public

**Empathy is the key!**



# Customer Satisfaction & Perception

- You will never please everyone, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't try!
- Sometimes it is the seemingly simple things that can upset a customer
- The ego can be a very fragile thing



# Customer Satisfaction & Perception continued



*Sage Advice...*

- If it is obvious that we cannot please the customer, the kindest thing we can do is to quickly and politely make them aware the work will happen and it will happen soon. There is nothing more cruel than giving false hope that the work can be avoided.

# Preventing Complaints

- Knock on the door before going into the yard
- Inspect the property for damages before beginning work and make the customer aware or document
- Follow proper trimming techniques
- Thorough clean-up
- Leave things as you find them
- Move things that could be damaged
- If you damage something, don't try to hide it



# Preventing Complaints

## continued

- Don't make yourself at home in the customer's yard
- If the customer comes out to see what you're doing, greet him/her. You are in their yard, ask if they have any questions
- If a customer asks to speak to your supervisor, help them get in touch with the supervisor or have the supervisor make contact with them
- Don't block the customer's driveway/sidewalk/mailbox with trucks or brush without letting them know



**If you Fail at any one of these things,  
the customer's perception is that you  
failed at **ALL** of them!**

# Seven Things Never to Say to a Customer

1. Hey, you, come here!
2. Calm down!
3. I am not going to tell you again.
4. Be more reasonable.
5. Because those are the rules/laws.
6. What is your problem?
7. What do you want me to do about it?

# Our Notification Process

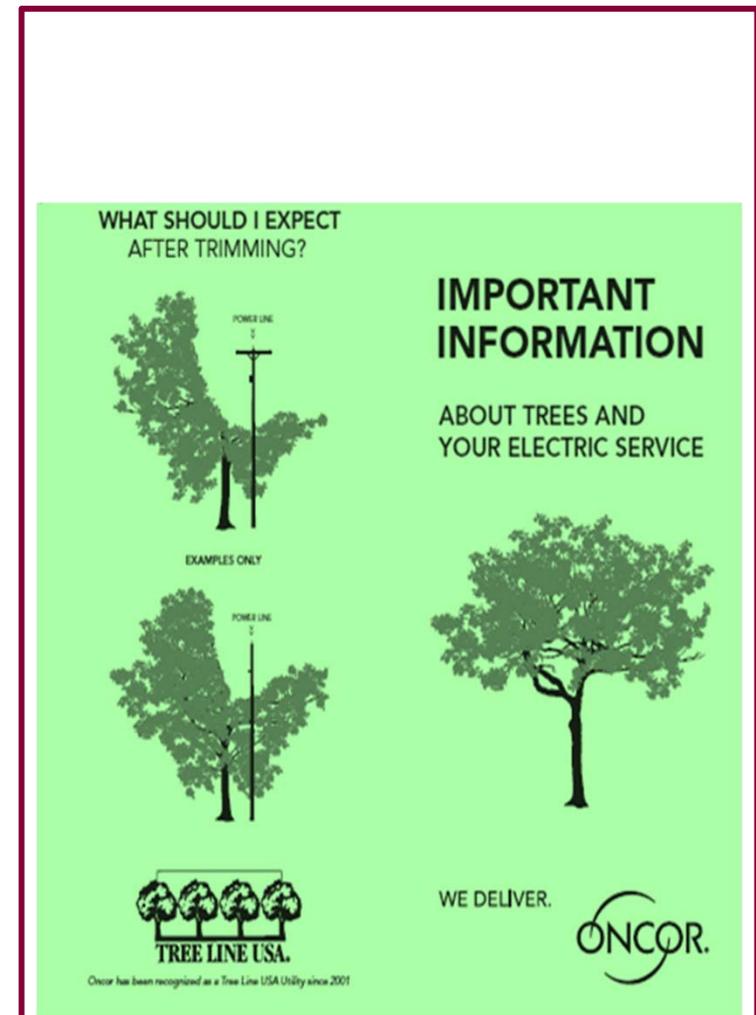
- Communicate with internal and external stakeholders
- Notify customers well in advance
- Make multiple attempts to speak to the customer in person
- Be persistent but polite



# Notification

- A contractor notifies customers in advance of planned work
- Positive contact is the goal, but door notices are left if contact cannot be made
- Two attempts are made on every property (about a week apart)
- Every encounter is documented and shared with the tree contractor that will be performing the work

## Door Card Example



# Notification

## continued

- Customer calls from the Door Cards are answered by an Oncor representative
- Customer information that is collected is relayed via phone call AND email to appropriate contractor supervisor
- A response is required by the contractor when an email is received and again when the customer is contacted. Contractors are evaluated on how well they respond to these issues
- Our Contact Center reports that VM related escalated issues have dropped dramatically since we implemented this notification process



# Communication

## “Sorry I Missed You” Card

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

TIME a.m. \_\_\_\_\_ p.m. \_\_\_\_\_

**ONCOR**  
Electric Delivery

**Sorry I missed you.**

I stopped by to discuss the following:

- The trees on or near your property are dangerously close to power lines and require trimming to prevent future problems. Your trees are scheduled to be trimmed on \_\_\_\_\_.
- Work had to be performed on your property today by \_\_\_\_\_. If you have any questions please contact us at \_\_\_\_\_.
- The tree(s) you wanted trimmed/removed is(are) not currently a hazard to Oncor Electric Delivery power lines.
- The wires you called about are not Oncor Electric Delivery power lines. You may wish to call the telephone company, your cable TV company or other electric company about this situation.
- The brush on your property is from the recent restoration activity. Oncor Electric Delivery is not responsible for its removal. You may wish to contact a private service for further assistance.
- Oncor Electric Delivery does not trim your tree that is near the service drop. You may wish to contact a private tree trimming company and/or the phone number on your electric bill for further assistance.

Form 1503 10/07

FECHA \_\_\_\_\_

HORA a.m. \_\_\_\_\_ p.m. \_\_\_\_\_

**ONCOR**  
Electric Delivery

**Siento no haberlo encontrado.**

Me detuve para discutir lo siguiente:

- Los árboles en o cerca de su propiedad están peligrosamente cerca de las líneas de energía y se requiere podarlos para prevenir problemas futuros. Sus árboles están programados para ser podados en \_\_\_\_\_.
- Tuvimos que desempeñar un trabajo en su propiedad hoy por \_\_\_\_\_. Si tiene alguna pregunta por favor contactenos al \_\_\_\_\_.
- El árbol(es) que usted quiso podar/remover no es(son) actualmente un peligro para las líneas de energía de Oncor Electric Delivery.
- Los alambres acerca de los que usted llamó no son líneas de energía de Oncor Electric Delivery. Si desea llame a la compañía telefónica, su compañía de cable tv u otra compañía de electricidad acerca de esta situación.
- El cepillo en su propiedad es de la actividad reciente de la restauración Oncor Electric Delivery no es responsable de removerlo. Si desea puede avisar a una compañía privada para ayuda adicional.
- Oncor Electric Delivery no poda su arbol que esta cerca del servicio de caída. Si desea puede contactar una compañía privada podadora de arboles y/o al numero de teléfono en su cuenta eléctrica para ayuda adicional.

Form 1503 10/07



# Communicate More

Our Notifiers and Arborists are prepared to give customers any printed information we have.

- Brochures
- Legal information
- Information on trimming techniques
- If they mention their attorney, we offer them access to our attorney



# Strategies

- Communicate with and rely on our internal community partners, city foresters, HOAs and local law enforcement
- Help educate our employees and contractors at every level to become Oncor VM advocates
- Educate customers and their attorneys on our rights and obligations to keep the lights on
- Build on everyone's desire to have reliable power

# Options We Offer

- Tree Replacement Check
- Design Solutions
- Alternative Maintenance
- Energy Saving Trees- Arbor Day Foundation Partnership

**Save up to 20% on your summer energy bills by planting trees.**

Complete the fields on the left to get started.



**About Energy-Saving Trees**  
Energy-Saving Trees is a research-based tool intended to help homeowners and communities companies save energy and money by strategically planting trees.

**Program Partners**  
Organizations & companies across the country are becoming partners with the Arbor Day Foundation to help reduce energy use through strategic tree planting.

    
An Exelon Company

[Find out more](#) [Learn more](#)



# Safety

*What we worry about the most!*

- When discussing the Oncor VM program with city officials, they are often shocked when they hear about some of the experiences our field personnel encounter:
  - Assaults (or attempts) with weapons and vehicles
  - Pushed, grabbed or blocked from exiting the premises
  - Firearms brandished and/or discharged
  - Dogs turned loose with threats of attack



***Threats of physical violence have declined since the notification process began in 2015***

# Safety

continued

- Take every threat SERIOUSLY
- Do not approach an escalated situation alone
- Ask for help
- Reach out to Corporate Security team
- Retain Temporary Restraining Orders and Permanent Restraining Orders when necessary
- Special Considerations documentation and tracking





## In Summary

- Some very simple things can make customer interactions better for everyone. Take the time and make the effort to learn and practice these things – it is well worth it!
- Communicate, Communicate, Communicate – with Internal Partners, External Partners and Customers and well in advance whenever possible
- Have a strategy
- Offer options when you can
- Safety, Safety, Safety – Trust your gut and don't be afraid to ask for help