

PRESS RELEASE

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Dirty Air More Dangerous Than Trees

News stories that highlight damage from fallen trees are dramatic, but in fact you are more likely to die from the air you breathe walking down the street, according to the professional arborists' association, NZ Arb.

Recent stormy weather uprooted trees across the country, causing damage to power lines and injuring people in Christchurch and Queenstown who were caught under falling trunks.

A fallen tree provides a spectacular photo or footage for the news but the reality is far less dramatic.

There are hundreds of thousands of urban trees in New Zealand but there is about one death per year in New Zealand as a result of tree failure. According to NZ Arb, the New Zealand organisation for professional arborists, the risk of dying from tree failure is about 1 in 4.5 million.

Air pollution causes more deaths in a year than trees falling. Massey University's Environmental Health Indicators New Zealand reports that in 2012, air pollution caused by human-made particles in the air (PM₁₀ or particles less than 10 micrograms in diameter) was associated with an estimated 1000 premature deaths and 520 extra hospital admissions for cardiovascular and respiratory diseases.

Will Melville, president of NZ Arb, says the key message for those concerned about the possibility of a tree falling in extreme weather conditions, is to use professionals to assess trees regularly for strength and viability, or the possibility of failure. For a suitably qualified and experienced arborist NZ Arb offers the public a short-list of approved contractors, arborists that have been assessed and accepted into the programme based on their level of skills, safety practices and customer service.

“Our thoughts are with the people involved in these unfortunate incidents,” says Melville. “The answer is, however, not to cut down trees randomly but to be diligent in assessing them. Trees contribute to liveability and sustainability in our cities but like all essential urban infrastructure they need to be assessed and managed by trained professionals.”

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