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News Release

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AUB TREE TRIMMING TO BEGIN IN INGLESIDE AREA

ATHENS, Tenn. – Tree trimming contractors for Athens Utilities Board (AUB) will begin work in the Ingleside area of town during the week of February 12.

Utility spokesman Wayne Scarbrough said residents along Ingleside Avenue, Tellico Avenue, Towanda Trail, Seminole Drive, and Guille Street will be the first to see crews at work on AUB's circuit two, which originates in the utility's North Athens Substation on Ingleside Avenue.

Over the course of the circuit-two trimming work, Woodward Avenue and the surrounding side streets and neighborhoods also will be addressed.

A so-called "super crew" consisting of seven workers, two bucket trucks, two chippers, and a chip-hauling truck will perform the work. Operating hours generally will be from 7:30 a.m. until 3:15 p.m., according to AUB.

The utility expects the entire circuit-two project to take about three months to complete, factoring in down time for bad weather. Crews will initially work from bucket trucks in areas of greater access along roadways and will save the most tedious and time-consuming work on back lots for last, Scarbrough said.

Scarbrough also points out that the work and results will look much different than in the past.

AUB last year began a more focused tree trimming program following a standard used by utilities nationwide. The standard, called ANSI A300 (American National Standards Institute) dictates the correct way to trim to gain proper power-line clearance while ensuring the health of trees for the long term, Scarbrough said.

"In the past, AUB has trimmed trees but in general we only snipped them away from the power lines, bluntly removing the ends of limbs. That is an unhealthy cut for the tree and the sucker growth that appears within months is right back in the lines, so we are back out trimming the same trees season after season. That's costly, and that expense eventually folds into rates," he said.

With more than 500 miles of primary lines, AUB historically has spent some \$700,000.00 annually on tree trimming. By working to ANSI standards and gaining the proper 12 to 15 feet of power-line clearance, AUB should be able to go three years between trimming a specific area. As a result, AUB hopes to trim costs by up to \$200,000 a year while providing more reliable service, Scarbrough said.

AUB Power Superintendent Nick Fortson said furthermore that direct trimming expense is only one costly result of trees in lines.

“Every year, year-round, we have outages caused solely by trees in the lines or by limbs that fall across a line. When this happens after hours, as it often does, we have to dispatch crews to clear the lines, repair them, string new line, even set new poles if needed. This work is being performed on overtime and it is expensive,” Fortson said.

While he concedes that some residents will resist the needed work, Scarbrough said that communication will be the key to an optimum utility-customer connection during the project.

An AUB representative will visit each affected property owner in the coming weeks to cover in detail which trees will be trimmed and the extent of the work needed. AUB will also leave door hangers at homes with an explanation of the work, a phone number and the name of a person to call at AUB with any questions.

“We know that this can be unpopular work, so we feel we owe it to customers to meet them face-to-face whenever possible to explain everything and to listen to their concerns,” Scarbrough said.

Fortson said the balance between trees and power reliability is delicate but clear.

“We all love our trees. At the same time, we all want reliable power with fewer blips and outages. We get many upset callers throughout the year asking why we can’t keep the blips from happening,” he said.

The cause, Fortson explained, is usually trees, or animals that jump from the trees to the power lines.

“For our industrial customers the blips and outages can cost thousands of dollars per event in lost production and scrapped product,” he said.

“Everyday we struggle to balance these two things across our service area: reliable power and trees in power-line rights of way,” Fortson said. “The two just do not coexist well.”
