

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Why do we need to trim trees?

Trees must be kept clear of overhead powerlines to ensure the safety and reliability of electricity supply.

Tree trimming around powerlines is carried out to minimise the risks of:

- electric shock
- power interruptions
- damage to powerlines; and
- bushfires in high-risk areas.

### Who is responsible for tree trimming?

State legislation sets out specific clearance requirements for property owners/occupiers and SA Power Networks.

A private supply line is any powerline on your property which supplies electricity to you and operates at 19,000 volts or less.

Owners/occupiers are responsible for the clearance of all vegetation on their property around their private supply lines, including vegetation overhanging from a neighbouring property. SA Power Networks is responsible for naturally occurring, non-nurtured vegetation around private supply lines.

SA Power Networks is responsible for establishing and maintaining clearances around all public supply lines, except in certain areas where the responsibility may be shared with local councils. If a powerline crosses land but does not supply the occupant of that land, it is a public supply line and SA Power Networks is responsible for vegetation clearance on that section of line.

### What are you doing to minimise the impact of tree trimming on the environment?

SA Power Networks is seeking to find a way of balancing community expectations regarding aesthetic and environmental considerations and our compliance with legislated tree clearances. There are a number of ways in which the impact of tree trimming can be reduced or avoided, although these have been extra costs attached to them which make them cost prohibitive in the majority of instances.

These options include:

- ensuring suitable species are planted underneath or near powerlines
- more frequent tree trimming cycles
- insulating powerlines, including using Aerial Bundled Conductors (ABC)
- relocation of powerlines
- removal of existing powerlines; and
- undergrounding of powerlines.

## **Why can't the trees be trimmed so that they still have their street appeal?**

SA Power Networks performs vegetation clearance in accordance with the *Electricity Act* and *Electricity (Principles of Vegetation Clearance) Regulations* and we are required to trim to the regulated clearance distances in accordance with the legislation. In metropolitan areas this is a three year cycle.

Our Vegetation Contractor is engaged to trim vegetation on our behalf to the required clearance distance. While undertaking this task, we will do our best to maintain the aesthetics of the tree however this will not always be possible to meet our legislative obligations.

Street side vegetation is generally owned and maintained by the council and they are aware of the necessity for SA Power Networks to maintain vegetation clearance around the powerlines.

## **Can I arrange for my tree to be cut by my own contractor?**

The normal arrangement for pruning vegetation is to cut trees on a cyclic basis in accordance with the *Electricity Act* and regulations. This agreement covers trees located on private land, where they are in proximity to overhead power lines, as described in the Regulations under the *Electricity Act 1996*.

## **What trees will we be trimmed during the 3 year cyclic trimming?**

SA Power Networks trim vegetation from around both, high and low voltage electricity conductors. The regulated clearance distances vary depending on the voltage of the conductors, span length and whether they are located in a bushfire or non bushfire risk area.

## **What must be considered when trimming trees around powerlines?**

Electricity can be dangerous. A branch or tree in contact with high voltage lines can potentially carry enough of an electric shock to kill. If you want to trim or remove trees near powerlines, you must take adequate safety precautions.

Under no circumstances should you bring anything that can conduct electricity close to powerlines. When using hand tools to clear vegetation, the safe working distance will vary between one to three metres, according to the powerline type and voltage.

When using power tools, the minimum safe working distance is three metres for all voltages (up to and including 33kV) and for all types of powerlines.

If you need to trim close to any powerline, contact the Office of the Technical Regulator (OTR) for safety advice.

Given the risk associated with working around powerlines, we recommend you engage a qualified contractor to undertake this work, at your cost.

## **What can you do to help minimise the need to trim trees around powerlines?**

You can help reduce tree trimming by calling SA Power Networks for information on recommended 'clearance zones' before planting new vegetation near a powerline on your property. For help in selecting appropriate trees to plant under powerlines go to the Online Plant selector tool: <http://plantselector.botanicgardens.sa.gov.au/>

## **Can I apply for an exemption for tree planting?**

The Technical Regulator may grant an exemption from planting restrictions.

If you intend to plant a tree that is not permitted by the regulations near a powerline, you must first apply for an exemption. The exemption typically includes conditions that a person must manage and maintain the vegetation and clearance distances and that it will be reviewed if the occupier or owner of the property changes.

Trees that are permitted to be planted under an exemption from planting restrictions will still need to be kept trimmed to the regulation distance from the powerlines.

## **Who is responsible for the clearance of debris after the trees have been trimmed?**

It is expected that our vegetation contractors will clear away any debris resulting from their vegetation trimming activity. Due to the workload and vehicle access in narrow streets, clearance may not be immediate, however should occur within 24 hours of trimming being undertaken.