

WHY DO THEY HAVE TO REMOVE THOSE NICE TREES NEXT TO MY ROADWAY?

Each year in the U.S. there are approximately 130,000 crashes involving trees and shrubbery. These crashes result in more than 3,000 fatalities and 58,000 injuries. Trees must sometimes be removed near a roadway in order to improve the driver's, bicyclist's or pedestrian's view of the road.

Many traffic crashes involving trees occur when vehicles run off roadways with little or no roadside clear zone. The roadside clear zone has been defined by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) as "that area outside the traveled way available for use by errant vehicles." Vehicles frequently leave the traveled way during avoidance maneuvers, due to loss of control by the driver or due to collisions with other vehicles. Common circumstances that may cause a driver to run off the roadway can be driver or environment related. Driver related contributing circumstances which may cause a vehicle to stray off the roadway include: improper passing, alcohol or drug involvement, falling asleep, driver inattention, or driver distraction. Environment related contributing circumstances which may cause a vehicle to run off the roadway include: debris in roadway, glare, holes or ruts in roadway, slippery surface, water ponding or animal in path of the vehicle.

A manual was developed by the Florida Department of Transportation to provide uniform minimum standards and criteria for the design, construction and maintenance of all public streets. The manual often referred to as the "FDOT Greenbook," is entitled "Manual of Uniform Minimum Standards for Design, Construction and Maintenance for Streets and Highways." The standards presented in the manual are intended to provide the basic guidelines for developing and maintaining a highway system. One of the items is entitled Chapter 3.B, Design Objectives, states that one of the specific objectives is to "Provide an environment that minimizes hazards, is as hazard free as practical, and is 'forgiving' to a vehicle that has deviated from the travel path or is out of control." Chapter 3.C.7.f.1 of the manual states that "The minimum permitted widths are provided in Table 3-12. These are minimum values only and should be increased wherever practical."

The FDOT Greenbook can be obtained at web site:

<http://www11.myflorida.com/rddesign/Florida%20Greenbook/Florida%20Greenbook%202002.htm>

In summary, trees in the roadside clear zone can be harmful in two ways: Trees can prevent vehicle recovery to the roadway and increase injury severity and property damage when crashes do occur. Good traffic engineering practice and state standards require that an adequate roadside clear zone be provided on all new road construction projects. This requires the roadside clear zone to be clear of trees and other fixed objects.