



STATE OF NEW JERSEY

BOARD OF TREE EXPERTS

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REGULATORY BULLETIN NOTICE OF NEW ENFORCEMENT FRAMEWORK

BACKGROUND:

In 2009, the New Jersey Legislature enacted the “Tree Experts and Tree Care Operators Licensing Act” (“The Act”) (N.J.S.A. 45:15C-11 *et seq.* and rules), L. 2009, c. 237, established the title “licensed tree expert,” and created a new licensing requirement for “tree care operators.” The law established the New Jersey Board of Tree Experts within the Department of Environmental Protection with nine members. N.J.S.A. 45:15C-13.

The Act defines **tree expert services** as tree pruning, repairing, brush cutting, tree removal, stump grinding or removal, tree establishment, fertilization, cabling and bracing, lightning protection, consulting, diagnosis and treatment of tree problems or diseases, tree problems, management during site planning and development, tree assessment and risk management, pesticides or any other form of tree maintenance. By comparison, **tree care operator services** include tree pruning, repairing, brush cutting or removal and stump grinding or removal.

All businesses providing tree care services for hire in the State of New Jersey are required to:

- Register with the Board (N.J.S.A. 45:15C-22)
- Have at least one employee licensed as a Licensed Tree Expert (LTE) or a Licensed Tree Care Operator (LTCO) in the company and at each branch location. (N.J.S.A. 45:15C-22)
- Maintain current liability insurance of at least \$1,000,000, (N.J.S.A. 45:15C-22)
- Maintain current workers compensation insurance for tree workers (N.J.S.A. 45:15C-22)
- Abide by adopted industry safety standards, including equipment, (N.J.S.A. 45:15C-20) and,
- Provide training to their employees in workplace safety and the safe operation of all equipment used (N.J.S.A. 45:15C-23).

Businesses shall display registration numbers (NJTC#XXXXXX) issued by the Board, on each service vehicle. All current registered companies will be listed on the Board website for verification. All customers are encouraged to check for current registrations before hiring: www.nj.gov/njbte/

RESPONSIBILITIES OF MUNICIPALITIES:

1. Municipalities must determine if a proposed contractor has appropriate Board of Tree Experts approval (Business Registration and at least one LTE or LTCO in the company). Failure to do so would allow the contractor to violate State law and increase the risk that a contractor will engage in unsafe and improper tree care activity. N.J.S.A. 45:15C-20.
2. Failure to determine if a contractor has appropriate Board of Tree Experts approval would allow any contractor to violate the Tree Expert and Tree Care Operator Licensing Act and regulations.
3. The Board of Tree Experts has the legal authority to determine who can and cannot engage in tree care activity. N.J.S.A. 45:15C-15, -21. Municipalities do not have the authority to grant permission to a non-exempt company that is not registered with the Tree Board to engage in tree care practices anywhere in New Jersey.
4. Finally, the Tree Board may examine any person in connection with any act or practice subject to the act, inspect any premises upon which any violation is alleged to have taken place or premises that constitute the licensee's place of business, and examine any record, book, document, account, or paper maintained by or for any licensee in the conduct of his business. N.J.S.A. 45:15C-26.

ENFORCEMENT FRAMEWORK:

In January 2026, the NJ State Legislature passed an amendment to the Tree Experts and Tree Care Operators Licensing Act amending N.J.S.A. 45:15C-28, to provide enforcement and penalty provisions that authorize the Board of Tree Experts to:

- 1) Issue an order requiring any person in violation of the law to comply;
- 2) Bring a civil action in court requesting the court issue a temporary or permanent injunction, award administrative and court costs, or award damages;
- 3) Levy a civil administrative penalty (a fine);
- 4) Bring an action for a civil penalty in court for anyone who fails to comply with a court order or pay the fine issued according to this law.

The Board of Tree Experts has a staff of Compliance Inspectors who engage with tree and landscape companies performing tree care services in the field, and determine whether they are in compliance with the Act. They evaluate the companies for registration, licensing, standards of practice, safety and ethics. They issue Notices of Violation for any observed noncompliance. As of January 2026, the Compliance Inspectors are empowered to file complaints in municipal or county courts for observed violations. This will result in a summons being issued to the violator, and will require them to appear in court and possibly pay a fine. In this way, the violation is handled by our existing court system, and becomes enforceable in the same manner as a traffic ticket. This will help bring more violators into compliance, which is the goal of the Act in the first place.

When a violation is observed by one of our Compliance Inspectors, they can file a complaint with the municipal court in the municipality where the violation occurred. This will enable any applicable fines to be assessed within this framework. See website for penalty details: nj.gov/njbte/