

AREA Forum**RESPONSE: EVALUATING TREE RISK IN THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT**

The following comments are in response to the AREA Forum discussion published in the *Journal of Arboriculture*, Volume 27, No. 2 (March 2001). If you would like to participate in the discussion of this subject, or propose another topic for discussion, please send your thoughts to ach@correo.azc.uam.mx or to the *Journal* Editor (see inside front cover).

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I am the senior arborist in a 70-ha harborfront area in the center of Sydney, which comprises the Royal Botanic Gardens (RBG) and Domain. The 35-ha RBG is fenced and is open daily from dawn until dusk, receiving more than 3 million visitors annually. The RBG is surrounded by 35 ha of parkland known as the Domain, which is unfenced. The tree collection within the entire area numbers 3,200. Many of these trees are old and culturally significant.

One area of the Domain is a mecca for cultural events, notably the annual series of free concerts that can attract up to 100,000 people on Saturday

evenings in summer. The area is flanked by trees, many of which are Moreton Bay figs (*Ficus macrophylla*) approximately 140 years old. People waiting for concerts during the hot afternoons understandably gather and picnic under the trees for much-needed shade.

These trees are becoming increasingly fragile because of all of the known issues and pressures on trees in public, open spaces, and some have dropped branches, though not all with signs of decay or defect. Shortly before one concert in January this year on a hot, windy evening, a fig dropped a branch on a member of the public, causing minor injury.

All trees in this area are inspected prior to the concert series, and all identified hazards are prioritized and rectified accordingly. For the next series of concerts (summer 2001–2002), we have identified trees that cause the most concern and will fence them off during concert days evenings only.

We have a duty of care to provide visitors with a safe environment while encouraging them to come and interact closely with our wonderful trees. Our procedures are something of a compromise, but are by no means a solution to this difficult dilemma.