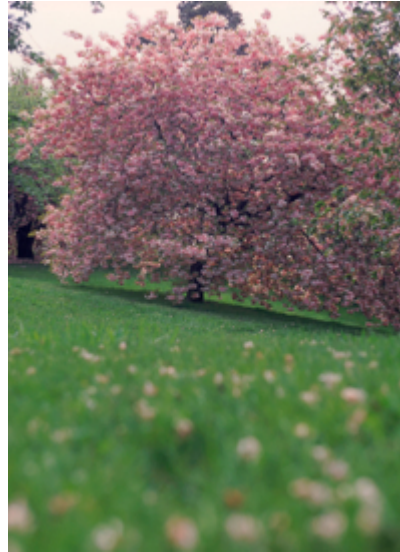




Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on May 31, 2011

N.C. Church Fined \$4,000 for Excessive Tree Pruning

"I just couldn't believe it when I heard it," remarked Eddie Sales, whom the church hires to trim the trees on the property surrounding its building. "We trim our trees back every three years all over our property, and this is the first time we have been fined."



Fox News reported, "The fine will be dropped if the church replaces each of the improperly pruned trees, said Tom Johnson, senior urban forester for [the] city of Charlotte Land Development Division."

Johnson explained that there has been a tree ordinance since 1978, and that the church is well aware that when trees are improperly pruned, it is subject to fines. The ordinance includes trees on commercial property or on streets, but not those on private property. "The purpose of the ordinance is to protect trees," asserted Johnson. "Charlotte has always been known as the city of trees. He added,

When we take down trees, we need to replace these trees. When they are nonrepairable, when they have been pruned beyond repair, we will ask them to be replaced. We do that for a number of reasons but mainly because they are going to come back unhealthy and create a dangerous situation down the road.

In the Charlotte area of North Carolina, there is apparently a "widespread lack of understanding on how to prune crape myrtles," which has resulted in an inordinate number of violations. Residents are advised instead to simply replace the trees, thereby allowing the fines to be lifted.

According to *The Charlotte Observer*, the [fines](#) are very specific:

On private property, fine amounts are based on the size of the tree improperly pruned. For small trees such as cherry trees or crape myrtles, the fine is \$75 per tree. Excessive cutting can increase that fine to \$100 per branch.

For large trees such as oaks or maples, the fine is \$150 per tree.

As a result of the harsh penalties, however, the state Division of Forestry meets with the group or individual receiving a permit to give instructions on how to properly trim the trees. Additionally, they recommend that anyone planning to do the work acquire a certification to trim the trees from the National Horticulture Board, though a certification is not mandatory.

In the meantime, Albemarle Road Presbyterian Church was told that the trees in violation must be cut down and replaced with new ones by October; however, the church has indicated an interest in



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appealing the order, concerned by the potential cost of replacing the trees.

“We trimmed back these trees in the interest of the church,” said Sales. “If we were in violation, we certainly did not know we were.”

Johnson noted that approximately six private residents a year are found in violation for improper pruning. “We are trying to be pro-active and not trying to fine people excessively,” he added.



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