



Going Out on a Limb to Get Action ; Utilities Pressed to Remove Dangling Branch

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(Source: Record, The; Bergen County, N.J.)By ELAINE D'AURIZIO, STAFF WRITER

RIVERDALE -- Everybody was breathing easier Thursday knowing that a large tree limb dangling for weeks from utility wires on Morris Avenue had finally been removed.

But Wednesday evening's work by a Cablevision crew was done only after a wave of telephone calls to electric, telephone and cable TV companies by borough officials and residents, who told of frustrating "that's not my problem" responses.

"They were all pointing their fingers at each other," said Mayor William Budesheim. "The branch was pointing straight down, so if it dislodged, it would go directly on whoever was underneath it. And that street has a lot of children on it."

It got to the point where the limb -- about 10 feet long and 6 to 8 inches in diameter -- was keeping residents indoors.

"We like to walk with our children, but we couldn't," said a neighborhood resident who identified himself as Allen and is the father of two children, ages 3 1/2 and 5.

In the beginning, residents tried calling the companies and said they received no satisfaction.

"It was a runaround, but nobody wanted to resolve the safety issue," said Allen. "You could touch it, that's how far it was hanging down. It was just a matter of time before it snapped."

He said that someone from Jersey Central Power & Light Co. came out and told him the utility was not responsible.

A representative from the company told The Record on Thursday that it got a call on Sept. 12 and sent a worker who "removed a branch off one of our service wires."

"We do take danger trees very seriously and remove them," said Ron Morano, senior public relations representative for JCP&L. Budesheim said the company did remove a smaller branch from the big one resting on its wire, but not the whole branch.

Residents also called Cablevision and Verizon.

"If we get a report that a branch is on a wire, we would go out and look at it," said Rich Young, Verizon spokesman. "If the situation is deemed hazardous and the pole is in the public right-of-way, we would remove it. If it was on a power line, we would expect the power company to remove it."

Frustrated, residents eventually called borough officials.

Linda Rochman, the zoning officer, then made calls to the companies. She, too, became frustrated.

"They said it wasn't their responsibility, it was the town's responsibility to remove it," she said.

Budesheim entered the fray, angered.

"We don't have a bucket truck and our workers are not trained to work around electrical wires," he said. "I wouldn't put them in harm's way to satisfy the laziness and cavalier attitude of the utility bureaucracy."

He said Wednesday that, if he didn't get any action by today, he was going to file a complaint with the Board of Public Utilities.

Before he could, Cablevision responded to a call Wednesday from The Record, and a crew was dispatched shortly before 8 p.m. to remove the limb.

"We are committed to the safety of our customers and are working with the town to address this situation," said Patrick MacElroy, spokesman for Cablevision.

"There were two bucket trucks and four men who worked hard to get it down," said Allen, who went to watch the removal. "The end result is that everyone can walk down the street without a limb falling down on them."

Budesheim had the last word, reflecting the neighborhood's feelings:

"I'm grateful that the branch has been removed, but it's a sad state of affairs that it took so much to get any one of the three utilities companies to act in a responsible manner."

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