

ARBORISTS PLAY VITAL ROLE

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An uprooted tree after a thunderstorm in Section 6, Kota Damansara.

MAINTAINING trees is a big job. With the thunderstorms that hit during rainy season, that job becomes even more important and brings to the forefront the need for experts in this field. As cities and towns in the Klang Valley try to conserve its mature trees, some of which are landmarks in their own right, it is clear that expertise is vital to keep a close watch on the health of such trees.

Currently, barely a handful of local councils in Selangor have arborists in their employ while the others say they are in the process of getting their staff certified.

In light of recent tree fall incidents, including the 130-year-old raintree in Jalan Ampang that toppled over and injured a couple, *StarMetro* spoke to several of these councils to find out their practices when it comes to tree maintenance.

Kajang Municipal Council (MPKj)

MPKj Public Relations assistant administrative officer Nadhirah Mohd Noor said maintenance of shady trees in the municipality was carried out periodically by the Landscape and Recreation Department and anytime they received public complaints, even on weekends.

“Our tree maintenance division has 115 officers and on-site workers.

“We have a tree pruning unit, with four teams in four zones namely Kajang, Cheras, Bangi and the Semenyih/Beranang/Hulu Langat zone.

“Each zone consists of 14 staff and machinery such as skylift, roll-on/roll-off (RoRo) lorry, wood chipper and tail-lift lorry,” she explained.



She said the landscape department also formed a special Integrated Pruning Operations, carried out every Thursday.

“It consists of the tree pruning unit, maintenance division as well as the Landscape and Recreation Department.

“It focuses on pruning shady trees along the main roads and is done on rotation basis according to zones (Kajang, Cheras, Bangi, Semenyih, Beranang and Hulu Langat).

“Areas are chosen based on the overall tree condition,” she said, adding that on other days, the team would work in their respective zones attending to complaints besides routine work involving high-risk shady trees.

The department also appoints a panel contractor (on a one-year term) to carry out special jobs that are out of the capabilities of MPKJ’s in-house team, including pruning large trees or cutting up large fallen ones.

“Using allocation from the Malaysian Road Records Information System (Marris) funds, contractors are appointed to carry out maintenance work on shady trees along main roads, and in industrial as well as residential areas.

“Assessment for trees are done by the assistant agricultural officer from the pruning unit in each zone and checked by the landscape architect via on-site and investigation reports before works are carried out,” said Nadhirah.



Trees like this require attention from arborists to ensure they are not a risk to residents.

Putrajaya Corporation (PPj)

Six officers from PPj have obtained their Certified Arborist credentials from The International Society of Arboriculture.

“From 2008 until now, PPj has sent 15 officers to attend arboriculture certification programmes in order to improve their knowledge and competency in landscaping, especially on arboriculture aspects,” said PPj Landscape and Parks Department vice-president Datuk Baharuddin Aziz.

“PPj’s arborists perform duties and provide input on arboricultural aspects for landscape planning, development, maintenance, tree inventory and data collection.”

He said PPj has a team comprising arborists, horticulturists and landscape architects to look into the overall aspects of a tree, which include scheduled tree pruning, tree thinning, tree health inspections and tree replanting.

“By definition, an arborist is an individual trained in the art and science of planting, caring for, and maintaining individual trees.

Arborists, or tree surgeons, are knowledgeable about the needs of trees and are trained and equipped to provide proper care,” said Baharuddin.

“A certified arborist and council worker are very different, since the latter has little to no formal training in tree biology or tree health, and very limited understanding of local trees and how to properly identify and treat tree diseases or insect infestations.

“Meanwhile, a horticulturist would take care of greenery, gardens and as well as work on different ways to cultivate plants.”

He added that PPj has also established a Tree Management and Inventory System (SIPP), where data on trees are updated into this system from time to time in order to monitor their overall health and condition.

While PPj conducts routine pruning and maintenance of trees, Baharuddin said they also receive pruning or removal requests from residents.

“Upon the advice of our arborists and horticulturists, we will evaluate the situation using Visual Tree Assessment method, before any action is taken, since it is imperative to protect and preserve mature trees from unnecessary removal or destruction.

“Sometimes the requests are based on personal preferences, as some people like lush trees and some do not,” he said.

According to PPj Parks and Recreation Department senior assistant director Azhar Abdullah, there are 700,000 trees in Putrajaya; 50,000 to 60,000 are pruned annually.

Azhar said problems arise when the wrong tree species are planted in the wrong place.

“By having an arborist involved in the planning stages, we are able to prevent problems from occurring down the line,” he said.

He disclosed that the department used Geography Information System, where every tree is implanted or tagged with a radio frequency identification (RFID) chip.

“The SIPP will contain information such as the contractors and quotations, on-site works and details of the trees.

“This way we are able to verify and monitor tree management works,” he said.

Azhar added that as it was the intellectual property of FRIM and PPj, the revenue derived from selling the system (to councils) would be split 50:50.

It was reported that the system won a gold medal in the FRIM Innovation Award 2013 and was also recognised at the Malaysia Landscape Architecture Award (MLAA) 2014.

Subang Jaya Municipal Council (MPSJ)

MPSJ Corporate and Strategic Management deputy director Azfarizal Abdul Rashid said the council ensured that trees in the municipality were closely monitored to prevent untoward incidents.

“We prune or cut down trees based on our supervision and public complaints.

“The council will first check if the trees are slanting, overgrown or have signs of decay or tree failure based on on-site observation,” he said.

After a thorough assessment, he said the council would then decide if the tree needed to be felled or merely pruned.



Azfarizal says MPSJ is always ensuring that trees are well monitored to prevent untoward incidents.

“If the tree is in a strategic location and residents are proactive in preserving the tree, then the case will be referred to a qualified arborist for a re-evaluation before we take any action involving risky trees.

“MPSJ, together with the Malaysian Arborists Association, organised a “Care for Trees” three-day course in February where council officers and contractors underwent training to learn arboricultural and landscape maintenance best practices. It is hoped that with careful monitoring, we can reduce the risk of tree toppling unexpectedly,” he said.

Shah Alam City Council (MBSA)

According to MBSA Corporate Communications head Shahrin Ahmad, the city council's Landscape Department has appointed 46 contractors for tree-pruning works along streets and at playgrounds and green spaces according to schedule. Tree-pruning works are supervised by the Landscape Department.

"We have an arborist in the council with two more officers from the Landscape Department taking the exam to be certified," he added.



MBPJ organises tree maintenance courses to train its staff and contractors in the best practices for landscape and tree

Petaling Jaya City Council (MBPJ)

"The city council does not have any certified arborists at the moment, although two officers have been sent to take the examination," said MBPJ corporate communications assistant director Abdul Hakim Khiruddin.

"In the meantime, we engage certified arborists when need arises. We have also organised tree maintenance courses to train our staff and contractors in the best practices for landscape and tree maintenance."

He said it is the Landscape Department's responsibility to monitor and maintain trees in Petaling Jaya.

"The team includes one horticulturist and nine agricultural assistants who have undergone training courses with Malaysian Society of Arborist.

"We have 30 contractors to help us on the ground," he added.

On the council's tree maintenance and monitoring procedure, Hakim said: "Trees are inspected monthly by our staff and the zone contractors, while pruning is done at least two times a year.

"Proposed actions or remedies are immediately submitted to the office if any infected, sick or dying trees are found or reported by the public."

Selangor Municipal Council (MPSepang)

MPSepang's Corporate Communications head Afra Fardillah Zaimustapar said contractors were required to engage an arborist in monitoring all landscape maintenance works.

"We are among the few councils in Selangor to have an in-house arborist," she added.