



For Immediate Release: 07.20.05

From: David Powers
Communications Director
708.358.5781

Contact: Jim Semelka
Village Forester
708.358.5700

Village Focuses on Young Trees During Drought

Facing one of the three driest periods since official weather record keeping began in 1895, Village crews and contractors have focused their efforts on making sure trees planted in the last two years receive sufficient water to survive.

Forestry Division crews are using two, 1,000-gallon tanks mounted on trucks to provide water for trees planted in the fall and spring of 2004, while a private contractor is working to water every tree planted this spring once a week. Watering is expected to continue until conditions improve.

With an average of about 250 new trees planted on public property in Oak Park every year, crews are working non-stop. But the going is necessarily slow, because thorough watering means each tree needs 30 to 50 gallons per application applied slowly to limit run-off and ensure the nearby moisture-hungry turf doesn't soak up the water before it can reach the tree roots.

"The focus is on watering younger parkway trees because they are most at risk from the effects of the heat and lack of rain," said Village Forester Jim Semelka. "Trees that have been in the ground for three or more years typically are well-acclimated and have natural defenses for dealing with the hot, dry weather."

As conditions worsen, leaves on otherwise healthy trees may turn yellow or brown, and fall off, Semelka noted. But for the most part, these trees are not dying, but are simply shedding leaves for which they can no longer provide water.

Healthy, well-established parkway trees should weather the drought. Even though they are not at as much risk as young trees, they would benefit from watering, too, Semelka said.

"Residents can help the established trees on their parkways maintain their looks – and health – by providing water," he said. "But correct watering takes time and effort. Since most of the uptake of water occurs in the top six to 12 inches of soil, trees should be watered slow and deep."

-more-

Trees and Drought
2-2-2

Semelka recommends a trickle from a hose moved regularly to ensure that the root area is wet. The entire area from the flare of the roots at the tree base to at least the edge of the foliage known as the drip line should be thoroughly watered for maximum benefit, he said.

Experts recommend avoiding watering grass in times of drought, a strategy Semelka said he wholeheartedly recommends.

"Brown turf may look bad, but it doesn't mean the grass is dead. It's just dormant. As soon as sufficient moisture becomes available, the green will return."

State law mandates summer watering restrictions for communities that use Lake Michigan water, which is the source of Oak Park's municipal water supply. From May 1 through Sept. 15, outdoor water use is limited Mondays through Fridays to even-numbered street addresses on even-numbered days, and odd-numbered addresses on odd-numbered days. Newly planted grass seed, sod, trees and shrubs are exempt during their first 30 days of growth.

For more information on tree care or watering restrictions, call 358.5700 or email publicworks@oak-park.us.

###