

# Trees and Cornstalks

***By: Pam Bergstrom, Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District Forester***

With the flooding that occurred in March of this year, a lot of people are finding cornstalks caught up around their trees and in their windbreaks. Is this a good thing or a bad thing? The short answer is it is a bad thing. With the cornstalks tangled amongst some trees branches and trunks, the moisture that the cornstalks hold can cause the new buds to get rubbed off and the tree won't be able to start new leaves this spring. The cornstalks can also put extra weight on the branches and that can weaken the branches and cause them to snap or break.

The cornstalks that are piled up around the base of the trees can put extra weight on the roots and cause the roots not to function to their optimal capacity. When the roots aren't working on a tree, the tree will start to suffer and slowly die. Also, with the cornstalks around the base of the tree, this will trap moisture and cause the base of the tree to stay moist and cause the base to start to rot or get a fungus that could travel to the rest of the tree.

Also, we don't know what all was in the flood water and the cornstalks could harbor some of these contaminants and as they start to decompose those contaminants could go down into the soil and eventually be drawn into the tree through the roots. This could compromise the trees and cause them to deteriorate or worse die. If cornstalks in windbreaks are not taken out, they could slowly kill off the windbreak.

What needs to be done? The simple answer is to pull those cornstalks and other debris away from the trees and dispose of them by burning them with a burn permit of course. For debris that is up in the branches, you will need to gently remove those cornstalks and debris from the branches careful that you don't hurt any buds or newly emerged leaves. Do not fertilize the trees or shrubs that were

affected with debris from the flood, this will in the long run cause more problems with the tree. The best thing to do is to check the tree for wounds and to make sure that the new buds for the trees and shrubs are present or have started to open to show this year's leaves. This goes with the evergreen trees as well since now the new candles or needles should start emerging in the next week or so.



Here you can see the cornstalks have been pushed up against the trees in this windbreak just north of Norfolk along HWY 81. Photo by Pam Bergstrom.



Again, some of the cornstalks and debris have been pushed into the windbreak but some has naturally come to a rest within the windbreak. Photo by Pam Bergstrom.



Debris hanging in the branches of the trees. this gives you an idea of how high the flood waters got. This debris should be removed from the branches as soon as possible. Photo by Pam Bergstrom.



More debris within a windbreak. You can see the debris is probably about 3 feet deep in some areas and is causing pressure on the roots of these trees. Photo by Pam Bergstrom.



A close up of the cornstalks that were pushed into the windbreak to clear HWY 81. Photo by Pam Bergstrom.