Hands-on chainsaw safety for municipal employees

Situation:
In 2013 Winnebago County added the position of a part-time horticulture educator to the UW-Extension office. A primary goal of this position was to provide training and support to local municipalities and County departments. Upon meeting with local stakeholders it was identified that many could not provide an essential training for their employees, hands-on chainsaw safety training. They could only provide training on the basics of chainsaw operation. This was in part due to the specialty nature of this training requiring a minimum number of trainees to be cost effective (12 participants). In addition, it requires a site with specific conditions. Due to the size of many municipal departments they do not have the minimum number and/or a proper site to hold the training.

Having hands-on training is essential to worker safety. It is extremely important for any individual to feel comfortable with the equipment, and when many employees (i.e. public works, highway, etc.) are only called out to conduct tree work in emergency response it becomes even more essential.

In addition, understanding proper cutting techniques and tree dynamics will lead to better care of the trees in our communities. Proper care will in return help to improve our tree canopy and green infrastructure making our communities a better place for everyone.

Response:
Seeing the need for a hands-on chainsaw safety training within the county, the educator worked with stakeholders to identify an appropriate instructor, and partners willing to provide training sites and appropriate clean up. Sites had to meet certain requirements to ensure safety of the participants. In addition, trees selected for the training needed to meet certain requirements for removal (i.e. risk tree, planted in wrong location, poor health, ash tree in EAB management plan).

Five dates in four locations were selected for training. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Urban Forestry partnered on the training, helping with advertising, logistics, and set-up. Additional partners were the City of Oshkosh, Winnebago County, City of Neenah, and Town of Menasha. The need for the training was evident by the regional composition of participants and the enrollment numbers (n=62).
Results and Evidence:

Participants found a new level of confidence when operating a chainsaw upon completion of the training. This included both participants with minimal and extensive training. This is evident through conversations during the training and from comments on the evaluations. The indoor portion of the training led to participants gaining a better understanding of how chainsaw maintenance affects productivity and safety. This led to many participants implementing changes to their safety programs. The hands-on portion of the training lead to participants having more confidence when cutting and instructing others in their workplace. Participants are looking forward to more advance training in the future.

“The skills learned today will greatly increase the safety of our tree cutting program. Learning the proper way to sharpen a chain will be a big asset. Tool use, safety equipment and tree felling only has added to our knowledge.”