

## Delayed Wind Storm Damage

### AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

Many of us are still picking up sticks from our yards from the December wind storm. Naturally the big limbs and major damage we experienced was likely cleaned up within a week or two. But a lot of the smaller branches, sticks and twigs if you will, were left until a later date. Now that we are starting to mow lawns we either pick those smaller branches up or hope that the mower can mulch them up as we mow over them!

Unfortunately, we are liable to see more results of that wind storm as the spring and summer progress along. When that wind storm came through there were some total failures of branches and entire trees. Trees were uprooted, broken off at varying locations, limbs blown completely out of trees, etc. Those failures were easy to see and quickly cleaned up. But now we start to play a waiting game.

Some branches may have been broken only partly and were still hanging on by half of the branch width or even just the bark. Those branches may appear to leaf out normally, and then die as we move further into summer. There was enough moisture in the buds for them to leaf out or getting enough through the remaining bark attachment to leaf out. But once stress hits, the leaves may just collapse. These branches need to be removed by a professional at some point in time. Other branches are effectively dead and won't leaf out at all. In some cases, broken branches will be completely detached, but still hanging in the tree, hung up on other branches. Foresters refer to these as "widow makers" as there's no way to know when they may come crashing down. I always recommend homeowners bring in professionals to get these broken off branches removed.

Trees that were tipped or partially uprooted, need to be watched very closely. Remember that many roots were disturbed to get to that point. You will want to water the tree regularly, but don't drown it, to encourage the roots to redevelop the small root hairs that are necessary for the tree to take up water from the soil. With evergreens that were tipped, it becomes even more crucial to try to get roots redeveloped. Evergreens won't wilt, the needles will just suddenly start to die and if that happens you need to just start making plans to remove the tree. Trying to straighten the tree up is often a mistake as more damage is likely to be done.

The tricky damage to see and diagnose though is the branch that has cracks running in the same direction as the limb or cracks with the grain. Since the weight of water and leaves wasn't present at the time of the storm or immediately thereafter, the branches may have looked normal all through the winter. But now the sap is flowing, leaves are starting to come out and the weight on those branches is likely to double or triple in the coming weeks. Branches that looked fine at first may suddenly show excessive sag and the cracks may become apparent. Or branches may just suddenly break on a calm morning or during a windy day. The extra weight of the leaves and sap were just too much and the cracks that occurred in December just now become apparent.

These branches can not be healed. Unlike bones that break and can grow back together, cracks in trees can not grow back together. The tree just tries to surround them with callous tissue to seal it off. The callous tissue grows slowly and is never as strong as undamaged wood. Even worse, for many trees, these cracks become an entry point for wood decay organisms. As hard as it is to accept, those limbs need to be removed and in some cases, the entire tree may need to come down. There's no way to know which branches or trees are injured in this manner. All we can do is stay aware and take corrective action if the damage shows up.