

Nice Work If You Can Get It

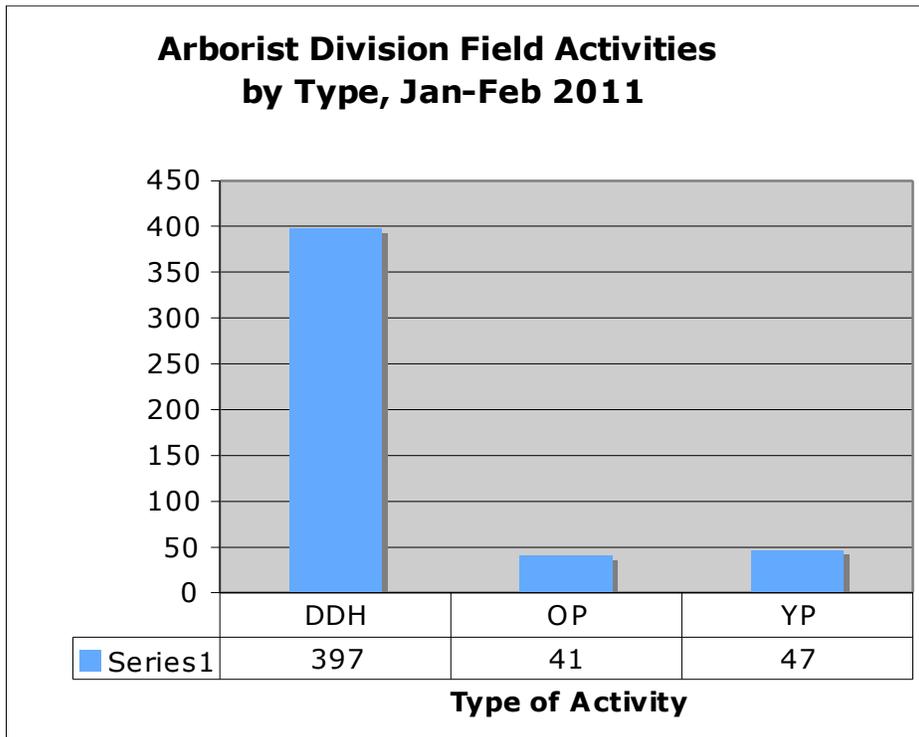
By Tom Coffin  
For The Tree Next Door

Introduction

In early March The Tree Next Door made an Open Records request for the field book notes of the three field arborists in the Office of Buildings for January and February 2011. We were informed that no field notes were available. Hand written field books have been replaced by computers to record all activities while in the field. We do not know if these are handheld devices, personal laptops, or computers mounted in the arborists' trucks. We do not know if the entered data is transmitted wirelessly and in real time or by thumb drive or other removable media.

The following figures graph the data the City provided under this new paperless system. **There are no field notes to either verify, contradict or even question these numbers.**

Figure 1: Total Production



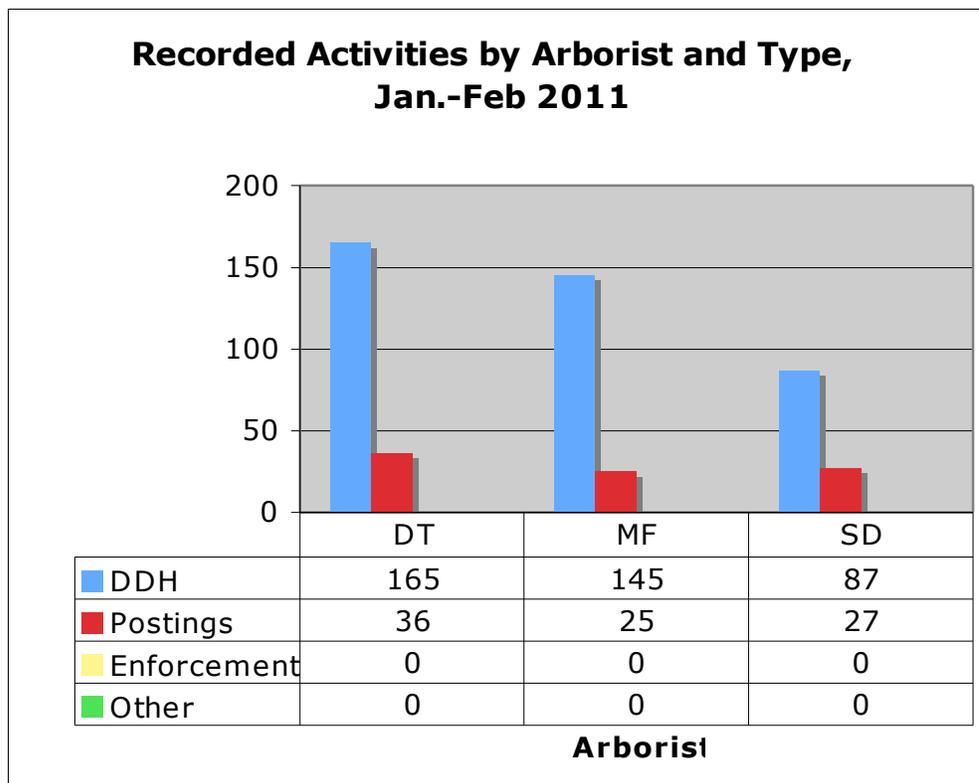
Where DDH = Dead, Dying or Hazardous tree inspections  
OP = Orange sign postings  
YP = Yellow sign postings

As this chart indicates, over 80% of the field arborists' work consists of individual tree inspections, the remainder in sign postings. An orange sign posting is simple. Writing in an address and planting the sign takes less than a minute. Yellow postings require matching site plan to site. Done according to the Standards of Practice, yellow postings may take longer – perhaps 10 minutes on average -- depending on the complexity of the site. With rare exceptions, individual tree inspections also usually require 10 minutes or less. Assuming an extremely generous 15 minutes travel between site visits indicates that three inspections per hour per arborist is a more-than-reasonable minimum to expect. An arborist spending just half-time in the field can easily – *easily* – produce 12 inspections a day.

**The average daily production of the entire field arborist staff in January and February was 12 reported site visits, or an average of four inspections per day per arborist. Each tree inspection and each sign posting required two hours time and cost the taxpayer two hours pay and benefits.**

It is fortunate that the City is simply awash in cash.

Figure 2: Individual Arborist Production



Where DT = David Tachon  
 MF = Michael Franklin  
 SD = Stan Domengeaux

DDH = Dead, Dying or Hazardous tree inspections  
Postings = Combined orange and yellow sign postings  
Enforcement = Stop Work orders, Correction Notices, Citations, etc.  
Other = Final CO inspections, Nuisance trees, Investigations, etc.

As indicated here, Tachon did nearly half (45%) of the total work, Franklin nearly a third (32%), Domengeaux less than one-quarter (23%). Based on 40 workdays in the period, Tachon averaged 5 inspections per day, Franklin 4.3, Domengeaux 2.9.

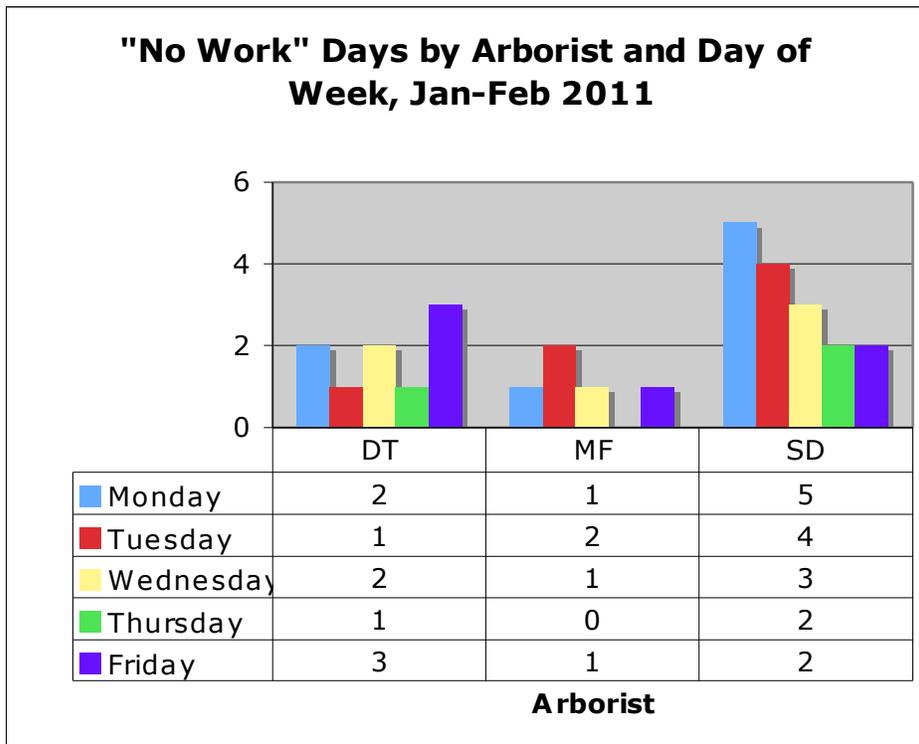
“Enforcement” and “Other” were added as categories in Figure 2. They are both empty categories, emphasizing the fact that **there was not a single enforcement action nor any other type of activity beyond DDH inspections and postings reported by any field arborist in any quadrant of the city in the first two months of 2011.**

#### “No Work” days

The daily averages considered above assume work performed every workday. However, on 30 of the 120 work days represented by three people working 40 days each, one or more of the field arborists reported no work in the field, for an overall 25% absentee rate. Tachon records 9 “no work” days (22.5% absentee), or about one day per week. Franklin’s record of 5 “no work” days (12.5% absentee) is about one day every other week. Domengeaux accounts for 16 (40% absentee) of the “no work” days, for an average of two days per week with no fieldwork recorded.

**These absentee rates are remarkably consistent over time. From April through June 2010, for example, with five field arborists employed, the overall absentee rate was 31%, with Tachon recording “no work” 23% of the time, Franklin 15% of the time and Domengeaux 38% of the time** (see “COA Field Arborist Productivity, January – June 2010: A Report to The Tree Next Door” at [www.treenextdoor.org](http://www.treenextdoor.org)).

Figure 3: “No Work” days by day of the week



Where DT = David Tachon  
 MF = Michael Franklin  
 SD = Stan Domengeaux

No pattern is observable in this chart for either Tachon or Franklin – not surprising, since this is an extremely small sample size. However, even these small numbers give some sense of a pattern in Domengeaux’s behavior, whose high rate of absenteeism – 40% overall -- peaks on Mondays (62.5%) and Tuesdays (50%). This pattern suggests non-random, and hence pre-planned, behavior on Domengeaux’s part. **But planned behavior or not, it is a legitimate question to ask just what Mr. Domengeaux does on his two “days off” every week, month after month.** Besides getting paid, that is.

Conclusions

This paper is the eighth in a series of reports by The Tree Next Door analyzing data obtained from the arborist division through Open Records requests. These reports present undeniable evidence of not just absenteeism, but lack of enforcement of the tree protection ordinance, refusal to follow Standards of Practice, fraudulent inspections, fraudulent data entry, lack of follow-up on dangerous trees and an utter lack of managerial action.

It is amazing that the City continues to pay people for not doing their job. It is ironic – and despicable – to pay them from a Tree Trust Fund originally created only to plant trees and educate the public in their rights and responsibilities under the tree protection ordinance. It is unconscionable for the Reed administration to continue its denial and cover-up of obvious, severe and debilitating problems in the arborist division.