FROM THE FRONT

"Dreams are the touchstones of our characters."
HENRY DAVID THOREAU AMERICAN ESSAYIST

Residents say trees have damaged power lines for years

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rad Drive since 1978, wrote in a text message to the News.

Marcatoma, an employee of Yale contractor Eastern Land Management, was leaving work when he tried to move a tree that had fallen across Conrad Drive, according to a Connecticut Public Utilities Regulatory Authority investigation into the incident. Marcatoma touched a power line pulled down by the tree and died of electrocution, the report furthers. The lawsuit filed by his family in April alleges that Yale failed to protect Marcatoma from the "rotted, decayed, and/or structurally compromised" tree.

This July, Yale filed a complaint against Eastern Land Management, alleging that the contractor is wholly responsible for any potential damages. On Wednesday, Eastern Land Management filed a response to Yale's claims, denying "any negligence."

Golf course manager was 'aware of everything'

Residents of Conrad Drive complained to Yale about dangerous trees "well before" Marcatoma's death, according to Patrick Kennedy, an attorney who represents Marcatoma's family. Kennedy added that Yale had the trees assessed but "inexplicably" decided not to prune and remove them.

"We believe this incident could have been avoided had Yale simply prioritized the safety of the people performing the work on the golf course," he wrote in a Friday statement to the News.

Ellen Abraman, Joel's spouse, said she and her neighbors were "pretty shaken" after Marcatoma's death.

Ellen Abraman said that when a Yale tree fell in her front yard, then-Yale Golf Course General Manager Peter Palacios "sent his crew down" to get it off her lawn. She said that if she noticed something amiss, she would call Palacios and "just let him know."

Conrad Drive resident Leslie Pitiger told the News that she had texted Palacios about the fallen tree prior to Marcatoma encountering it. She said she has lived on Conrad Drive for 28 years.

"Peter was aware of everything," Pitiger said on Saturday when asked about the extent of Palacios' knowledge of incidents involving falling trees.

Palacios, who was reached by the News via a phone number provided by the Abramans, later responded via email denying responsibility for tree removals along Conrad Drive. He did not immediately respond to the News' further inquiries regarding residents' claims that they would text him to remove trees.

"Any suggestion that I was responsible for decisions regarding tree removal is factually incorrect," Palacios said in his Tuesday email to the News. He said that he did not have the authority to identify or mark trees along Conrad Drive for removal and was not tasked to do so.

At least two Yale trees in the area where Marcatoma died had fallen prior to the incident, Pitiger said. One of those trees, she said, knocked down an electric wire and set a resident's lawn on fire.

Palacios left Yale earlier this year and now works for the Claremont Country Club in California, according to his email signature. Since then, the Yale Golf Course has been transferred from Yale Athletics to the Yale Office of Facilities after poor maintenance led to deteriorating conditions, according to a Sept. 29 article in The Athletic.

When asked about the plaintiff's claims, Ronnie Rysz, a spokesperson for Yale's Office of Facilities, wrote in an email that "Yale does not comment on pending litigation."

Yale's Office of Public Affairs and Communications did not respond to the News' request for comment.

Ongoing litigation

In July, Yale filed an apportionment complaint against Eastern Land Management, the contractor that employed Marcatoma. The complaint stated that if "negligence on the part of anyone" harmed Marcatoma, such negligence was "wholly caused" by ELM's actions. The complaint claims ELM failed to give Marcatoma enough guidance about electrical hazards.

In August, Yale filed a cross complaint against ELM, alleging that Marcatoma's death was "the direct result of the acts and/or omissions" of Marcatoma himself. It states that Marcatoma "knowingly and willingly touched" the electrical wires, despite the golf course's superintendent telling him not to. The Connecticut Public Utilities Regulatory Authority's investigation into the incident said eight out of 10 witnesses observed Marcatoma touching the wire with both hands.

"Mr. Marcatoma's passing has deeply affected many throughout the ELM family," attorney Carmen Nicolaou, who represents ELM in the case, wrote to the News in an email. "Because the case remains pending before the court, ELM cannot comment on the allegations or otherwise address the merits of the claims."

On Wednesday, ELM responded to Yale's apportionment complaint, writing that the alleged harm was due to the "negligence, recklessness, or carelessness" of entities other than ELM, "including but not limited to Yale."

'They all point the finger'

Conrad Drive is located along the border between Yale property and New Haven. Houses line one side of the street, while the other side contains a wooded area. Pitiger said stakes with pink tape near the wooded area delineate the line between Yale and New Haven.

Joel Abraman said trees began regularly falling on power lines about ten years ago. He said that he would see wires in the street sometimes "sparking." Though the residents had raised concerns about many Yale trees in need of removal, the trees had not been cleared out, Ellen Abraman said.

She described a lack of clarity about which trees belonged to Yale or New Haven. If a tree leaned over the street, one side of it might be on Yale property, while the other side might be on city property, she explained.

"If something falls on whatever the line is, wherever that line is, no one seems to be able to figure out who should be responsible," she said.

"They all point the finger," Joel Abraman said.

Annie Mixsell, the city's tree warden, wrote in a Tuesday email that the New Haven Parks Department inspects every city-owned tree on Conrad Drive "for maintenance needs" and to identify trees that require removal or pruning.

"That work has been ongoing and is near completion," Mixsell wrote. "It is our understanding that Yale has retained their own arborist to inspect and manage the privately-owned trees on its property as well."

Palacios wrote that while he accompanied the tree warden to assess trees along Conrad Drive, "the authority to determine which trees would be removed rested solely with the appropriate municipal and utility authorities."

Pitiger said that last year, arborists marked trees that needed to be removed with orange tags. Some, but not all, of those trees were removed, she said. It was unclear whether the trees were marked before or after Marcatoma's death.

As of Saturday, two trees on Yale's side of the pink tape were marked with orange tags, including one that leaned over the street near a power line.

Pitiger said Yale did not take all the trees down because of the delineation between Yale and New Haven property.

"There was a question between theirs and mine. It's like, well, that might be on New Haven's property," she said.

Falling trees, frequent power outages

Joel and Ellen Abraman said that fallen trees cut off their power around five times per year, and Pitiger said that she lost power seven or eight times in 2025.

Pitiger said she observed a tree by the golf course entrance, near where Marcatoma died, that fell during a storm before Marcatoma's death. It caused a power outage for about three and a half hours, she said.

Conrad Drive resident Renee Kohn said that power outages used to occur "all the time" and that the falling trees were primarily on Yale's property.

"Just a slight wind and we would be out of power," she said.

Before Marcatoma's death, a tree on Yale's property near the golf course entrance knocked down an electric wire, setting the lawn of 170 Conrad Dr. on fire, Pitiger said. Pitiger said that her neighbor was walking a dog in that area when the tree fell and the lawn ignited. The neighbor called the fire department, Pitiger said.

Joel Abraman said he recalled a "sparking live wire" on the ground that ignited the foliage. The New Haven Fire Department used the fire hydrant in front of their house to put out the fire, Ellen Abraman said.

"Yale should have known," Pitiger said when informed about the lawsuit. "But Yale didn't care."

The lawsuit is set to go to trial in October 2027, according to Connecticut's Judicial Branch website.

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Nausicaa Chu / Contributing Photographer
This is Conrad Drive, the street where a landscaper was electrocuted last year. Resident said trees regularly took down power lines prior to his death and that they had flagged precarious trees to the Yale Golf Course's general manager at the time.

Less than half of Yale college has tickets to The Game

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Mehta-Vasisht said in a phone interview. "This is such a milestone for us to cap off our four years, and I think being able to go to every other game, and then not going to our last, definitely feels like a punch in the gut."

In just over a month, Yale students will flock to Boston and cover the city in Yale Blue for the 142nd edition of The Game, which is considered to be the pinnacle celebration of Yale Athletics every year. Fenway Park will host the game for the first time since 2018 as the oldest rivalry in college sports takes the field in one of America's most iconic baseball parks.

But the limited number of tickets and a weighted lottery system has left more than half of Yale's near-6,700 undergraduates without a ticket for one of Yale's most anticipated traditions. Only 2,900 students were allocated tickets, leaving around 3,800 students, or 57 percent, without a ticket.

"We were all shocked at first," Mehta-Vasisht said. "It was definitely frustrating because The Game is at Fenway and a lot of us were excited for this new venue, and then it did not work out for myself and so many others."

While resale tickets are available for unlucky students, Mehta-Vasisht said that is not a financially realistic alternative for her. Other students, who were lucky enough to secure a ticket, said the low share of students with a ticket diminishes The Game's experience for everyone.

In the lottery, seniors were by default given four entries, juniors were given three, sophomores were given two and first years were given one. To boost their chances, students could earn up to five additional entries by attending select Yale Athletics events.

Colleen Murphy, the assistant athletic director for strategic communications, emphasized in an email to the News that the lottery system was clearly communicated to students.

"We worked closely with the Yale College Dean's Office to ensure students had clear information about the process and their opportunities to participate," she wrote. "Students selected through the lottery received a purchase link and deadline directly through their Yale email address."

Murphy added that Harvard's allocation to Yale remained the same as in previous years. Harvard Athletics spokesperson Darin Wong told the News last month that the allocation of 2,900 tickets per game is "consistent with visiting school student ticket allocations for games at both Harvard Stadium and the Yale Bowl over the past several years."

While the Crimson's home stadium can hold about 25,000 people, Fenway can hold around 37,000 when transformed for football games. The Yale Bowl has a seating capacity of over 60,000.

Léa Mansour '28, a junior from Georgia and a football fan, said in a phone interview that The Game offers a rare opportunity to experience the kind of intense school spirit, packed stadiums and tailgating culture more commonly associated with large college football programs.

"The experience of Harvard-Yale is so sacred to me because I finally get to feel that way even at a high elite institution where sports do not really matter to the student body," she said.

Sophomore Jack Smithwick '29 said he was disappointed.

Left without a ticket, Smithwick wrote in a text message to the News that he was going to look "at other options including buying from other Yale friends, Harvard students, and other websites, however all are more expensive."

Mehta-Vasisht said buying a resale ticket was not a realistic alternative "unless you want to drop a couple hundred bucks."

"I do not have the means to drop that much on a football game," Mehta-Vasisht said.

With high listings for seats for the general public and no tailgates outside the stadium, some Yale students are considering ditching the trip to Boston altogether.

"I just think they should automatically give all students a ticket," Mansour said, emphasizing the relatively small size of the Yale undergraduate population compared to the number of seats in the stadium. "It honestly takes away from students' experience of such a crucial part of Yale."



Liza Kaufman / Photography Editor
Some Yale students expressed frustration after Yale Athletics' Monday afternoon email notification about lottery ticket results for The Game,

Even students who received tickets expressed frustration with the process.

Alya Bedawi '29 told the News that, despite securing a ticket, her overall enthusiasm for The Game has diminished.

"I'm less excited because so much of what makes Harvard-Yale meaningful is the sense of community surrounding it," Bedawi said. "It's about experiencing the tradition with the people you care about, and if they aren't there, it feels like some of that meaning is lost."

Students lucky enough to have won the lottery will head to Boston next month, while those less fortunate will hope to secure a ticket off the waitlist.

Team 153 will play the Crimson on Nov. 21 at 3:30 p.m. at Fenway Park.

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