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OLD and big trees in city centres that have been inspected and certified as dangerous by arborists, must be felled or relocated to ensure public safety.

Landscape architect consultant Hashim Gombri said this move would include high-risk heritage trees.

He stressed that checks to certify such trees as safe should also be done every six months rather than two years as was the current practice.

Hashim, who has also developed a manual for tree preservation and green infrastructure for Institute of Landscape Architects Malaysia (ILAM), said it was imperative for Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) to adhere to the advice of arborists to fell such trees or relocate them to a suitable location.

“The authorities need to carry out a ‘tree transplant’, meaning relocate the old shady trees to areas that have optimal green buffer space to survive,” he said.

He highlighted that an important factor to consider was that not all of the big, old trees had the root volume to survive in a concrete jungle environment like Kuala Lumpur, even with selective pruning to reduce the tree burden.

“At the moment, we see that these huge trees are confined in small spaces in the city centre where the root system will suffer decay.

“These trees have to be chopped down and replaced with more tolerant ones that are suitable for cities,” he told *StarMetro*.

“By right, risky trees need to be checked every six months,” said the arborist with 25 years of experience.

Following last week’s incident when a rain tree at Jalan Sultan Ismail toppled, killing a motorist, Kuala Lumpur residents and non-governmental organisations had pleaded for DBKL to not go on a tree-felling spree.

Another tree fell during Monday’s thunderstorm near Menara Prestige in Jalan Pinang, Kuala Lumpur, damaging sever-

‘Check risky trees every six months’

Regular inspections can help authorities decide whether to remove or relocate them, experts say



The Ficus that fell along Jalan Pinang on Monday, damaged a few cars. — Filepic

al cars and motorcycles parked in the vicinity.

The Ficus tree was located about 600m from the earlier rain tree incident.

Storms also uprooted trees which damaged the roof of a house in Taman Gembira in one incident and a car at Universiti Malaya in another.

Hashim said the Ficus that toppled had shallow roots, and this, compounded by heavy rain and strong wind, led to it falling over.

“The authorities need to realise that we are experiencing a drastic climate change crisis.

“The city is becoming increasingly hot with strong winds.

“Undoubtedly, cities must have trees as they are most effective to absorb carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide emitted by vehicles,” Hashim said.

He suggested that Kuala

Lumpur’s green city planning policies be reexamined.

When asked how high-risk trees were checked for potential decay, especially in the root system, he said arborists used a resistograph, which is a mechanical resistance measurement device to detect decay and the inner condition of the tree structure.

“Above ground, we will check trunks, branches and twigs for diseases like fungus.

“The resistograph is to check if there is a ‘void’ of living cells in the tree structure.

“As for the roots, we will check for any disturbance in the system in terms of size,” said Hashim.

He added that what often happened in cities was that trees’ roots were cut to accommodate development, leading to

their weakness.

UPM Faculty of Forestry and Environment senior lecturer Dr Ruzana Adibah Mohd Sanusi, when contacted, said the management of trees in the city would depend on the health and status of the identified trees.

“Risk assessment through regular inspection is critical, as it would inform stakeholders before a decision is made to fell or not to fell the trees.

“This of course is subject to resources available to the organisation,” she said.

On the subject of risk assessment, she said there were many considerations.

“For example, if you don’t fell the tree, other things can be done (like intervention) to mitigate risks,” added Ruzana, whose specialisation is in city forests and arboriculture.