Fallen leaves can be hazard

By David Scott
Emerald Contributor

Dead leaves.

Poet Robert Frost proclaimed them a natural beauty, but for some bike riders and motorists in Eugene last autumn and this winter, dead leaves create an ugly scene.

The City of Eugene Public Works Department, which has run its annual leaf pickup program since early November, spends each day discarding all the rotting leaves people pile in the street next to the curb.

However, the giant vacuum and dump trucks can reach only so many blocks each day.

In the meantime, drivers and bicyclists compete with dead leaves for clean, safe portions of street in which to drive and park.

"We can't be everywhere, but we guarantee people two pickups at least," said Richard Zucker, leaf pickup coordinator for the city. "(Leaves) are a problem on bike lanes. Some people overdo it and forget to leave bikers room."

On the University campus the grounds crew works daily to keep the leaves under control, University public safety officer Kay Coots said. No accidents related to slippery leaves have been reported, she said.

University computer science student Tod Tryk, who lives off campus, is one person who battles the leaves nearly every day.

Tryk, standing on the front steps of his home at 1855 Olive St. in South Eugene, pointed to four giant maples, which had shed a blanket of red and yellow partly decomposed leaves that lay in the street below. Each day Tryk endures parking in the organic mass, which extends 10 feet into the street.

"I see people slipping all over," Tryk said. "We have a chronic leaf problem."

Tryk said the leaves rot, then turn to compost, making a slippery mat. Rain makes matters even worse, he said.

"That's the price you pay," he said. "These trees are beautiful, but in the meantime we're going to be skidding."

So will bicyclists who maneuver leaf-clogged streets, said Eugene Police Department public information officer Tim Birr.

"Certainly it's something we're concerned about," he said. "It's something that comes with the season."

Birr himself crashed on his bike in 1984 when he chose to ride through some leaves close to the curb to escape automobile traffic. The idea worked well, Birr said, until he ran over a hidden branch, sending him over the handle bars onto the street.

University student Phil Levinson also crashed on his bike because of wet leaves on the street.

"I was riding down a hill on East 18th, and I turned onto Agate (Street), but I was going too fast," said Levinson, a speech major. "I skidded on this pile of leaves on the corner and wiped out."

Garbage disposal companies in Eugene also help to alleviate the leaf problem.

"People are putting more leaves in containers than in the past," said Bruce Schafer of Cascade Garbage Service. "The 90-gallon roll-out carts help a lot."

Schafer said he worries most about his drive home.

"My driveway has a 45 degree incline and lots of leaves," he said. "I put my truck in four-wheel drive and up I go."

Photo by Andre Kanieri

Cyclists and motorists must endure the treachery of slick dead leaves across campus and the city.

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