

Officials to decide soon when to cut trees down

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A thousand diseased pine trees along Highway 1 in Santa Cruz County will have to come down, but when and how awaits the outcome of a meeting in Berkeley Friday between scientists and Caltrans officials.

That the trees have to come down is a foregone conclusion, Jim Claypool, Caltrans senior maintenance engineer for this area, said yesterday. The only question remaining is what to do with all that wood, he said.

"We hope to have an answer Friday," Claypool said.

The trees in question are Monterey pines afflicted with pitch canker, a fungus that enters the tree through a wound and causes branches to turn brown from the tips back and pitch to soak the wood.

The disease, which is a widespread forest disease in the Southeast, was first spotted in California in Santa Cruz County early last summer. Pitch canker alone does not necessarily kill trees, but it leaves them weak and ready targets for other diseases and insects that finish them off.

One of the main infestations is on Caltrans property along Highway 1 from the Highway 17 interchange to the Park Avenue exit, but infected trees have been identified from Pajaro to Natural Bridges and from the ocean to the mountains.

More diseased trees have been identified along Highway 280 in Menlo Park, and a possible infestation is being investigated in Santa Clara County as

well, Claypool said.

Caltrans had originally estimated that 300 trees would have to come down in Santa Cruz County, but more recent surveys have indicated that between 900 and 1,200 trees are affected and will have to be taken out, Claypool said.

The job will cost at least \$250,000, Claypool said, and will be put out to bid as soon as the decision is made as to how to dispose of the wood. A report in the Santa Cruz Sentinel that the job had already been put out to bid was incorrect, Claypool said.

In addition, the Sentinel's report that trees to come down had been marked with white paint was also in error, he said. Trees marked with white paint are trees from which samples have been taken, Claypool said.

Several disposal options have been considered, he said. Care must be taken with the diseased wood so as not to spread the fungus further.

"We can chip up all the limbs that are chippable," Claypool said. "And we may be able to debark the big logs and use them for firewood."

But the firewood could not leave the county, and would have to be stored in plastic tents to keep insects, which are thought to carry the fungus from tree to tree, from leaving the dead wood, Claypool said.

Another option had been to take the big logs and trunks to a dump, but Claypool said the dumps didn't want the wood because there is so much of it. So Caltrans is exploring the possibility of burning the wood,

Claypool said. It has been in touch with the Regional Air Quality Control Board about getting the proper permits.

Whatever is done, the downed trees cannot simply be left where they fall, Claypool said, because the dead wood would then invite all kinds of insects to breed in it.

Meanwhile, Steve Tjosvold, UC-Extension farm adviser, is continuing his experiments at New Brighton State Beach. He has been wounding and infecting trees with the fungus to see how long after a tree is wounded it is still susceptible to infection. He said yesterday he was starting to get some results.

"Some of the twigs that had some time to heal were less affected," Tjosvold said.

And although he said he was still skeptical, Tjosvold was planning to do some experiments using injection of a fungicide into the trees. The city of Capitola, where many trees have been affected by pitch canker, was still considering paying for those experiments, Tjosvold said.

Tjosvold and scientists working on pitch canker at UC-Berkeley are doubtful of the testing methods that were used to support the claims about the injection method. Tjosvold said yesterday that literature sent him by George Reynolds, the Cambria tree-maintenance man who administers these injections, says the product works against a different strain of fungus than the one that causes pitch canker.