

Insects

Beetles endanger Monterey pines

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SANTA CRUZ — Hundreds, and possibly thousands, of pine trees in the area are being threatened by an infestation of engraver beetles. Death of trees is almost certain if left untreated.

Monterey pine trees — second in number locally only to redwoods — are the primary victims to what one Santa Cruz tree surgeon calls an “epidemic.” Pine trees are an easy catch due to their “soft” wood.

The almost-microscopic engraver beetles, drill underneath the soft bark of the pines. They get into the so-called “cambium” layer of the trees — the area in-between the bark and the hardwood from which new wood and bark grow.

It's because of their location that the beetles are so difficult to get. David McBay, owner of Pleasant Valley Tree Service — who discovered the “epidemic” — says chemical spraying is virtually useless. He recommends that infected branches be pruned off and burned.

Infected trees are easily distinguished as entire branches turn brown and die. Dozens of trees in early stages of infestation — with just one or two dead, brown tips of limbs — are prevalent along Highway 1 from Santa Cruz to Rio del Mar, as well as at New Brighton State Beach in Capitola.

Ron Tyler, UC Agricultural Extension Director in Santa Cruz, told The Sentinel this morning that engraver beetles are not “uncommon” to the area. He agreed with the treatment recommended by McBay, saying cutting off infected branches are the best way to stop the spread of them.

Tyler also said, however, that in-



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Tree expert David McBay points out infected branches.

fectured trees could take years to die. He added that prime victims are weakened trees that aren't completely healthy.

McBay guesses that constant wet winters of the past several years has caused oversaturation of the ground and weakened trees, making them

prime to attack by beetles this year.

He recommends that residents who discover beetle-like damage on trees, call a professional tree-service company.

“Infected parts are usually pretty high up,” he says. “Plus, such massive treatments might be

needed, we could have all the tree surgeons in the county working 24 hours a day trying to cut out bad parts.”

Untreated trees will not only spread the infestation, but also open up the tree to other insects and diseases, McBay adds.