

Canker spreading fast in area Monterey pines

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CENTRAL COAST BUREAU

The deadly pine pitch canker that has turned many Monterey pines from deep green to rusty brown is spreading fast and there's little that can be done to stop it, scientists said Wednesday at a daylong seminar held in Carmel.

"By the time you see the infection from the ground, you probably have lots more — many infections that are not yet symptomatic," said Thomas Gordon, a professor of plant pathology at UC-Berkeley.

There is no cure and no known chemical or natural way to treat the trees. Even pruning affected branches, a common practice, is futile, the panelists told the 200-

plus people gathered at Carmel's Sunset Center.

The scientists said certain environmental conditions also contribute to the spread of the disease: Urbanization, where trees come in contact with exhaust and other pollutants, and drought are the two most common problems.

Infected trees have an 85 per-

cent mortality rate, scientists said.

In a controversial recommendation, the scientists from UC-Berkeley and Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo told the audience of property owners, environmentalists, foresters and government officials not to plant Monterey pines.

"The scientific recommendation is not to plant the Monterey pine,"

said Andrew Storer, a postdoctoral researcher at UC-Berkeley. "If you plant a Monterey pine, the chances are you make the disease spread."

Biologist Vern Yadon, retired curator of the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History and a locally well-known naturalist, who attended the seminar, said he dis-

agreed with the recommendation.

"It is my thought that we are doing no wrong by planting the genetic stock that is on the Monterey Peninsula," he said.

Yadon said that in planting the trees, "we expect to lose some," but some resilient ones will survive and not develop the canker.

"We're talking about maintain-

ing the genetic, ecological profile of the Peninsula," he said. "We have to maintain Monterey pines on our property."

The fungus, which was first found on the Peninsula early last year, killed hundreds of pine trees in Santa Cruz County, where it was discovered in 1986. It also hit forests in Lake Tahoe in 1990, turning lush green mountains into a rust-colored mass, as slides shown at the seminar depicted.

The disease is commonly spread by insects, which carry the fungus from tree to tree and often are responsible for infecting other areas.

Most of the trees in Monterey County still seem to be in the

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How to spot the first signs of pitch canker

The first sign of pine pitch canker is a change from deep green to light green during new growth on the Monterey pine trees.

As the disease progresses, the needles turn from light green to yellow, then to red, before drop-

ping off the tree.

But discoloration alone does not prove that a tree suffers from canker. Other less-serious infections also may discolor pine needles.

Other indications that the pine is infected with canker is that the

branches become soaked with resin, and in advanced stages, pitch falls off the branches and forms a whitish-colored crust on lower branches.

The infected wood beneath the bark also is soaked with resin,

which turns it amber.

The canker can be found in trees throughout the Central Coast.

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early stages of the disease, though with no way of stopping it, local foresters and tree workers have been looking at a dreary future for the pine trees.

"I'm disappointed scientists have not come up with a cure or chemical that would help, but I guess it's nature's way of dealing with the forests," said seminar participant Ebaristo Valdez, owner of E. Valdez Tree Service, which operates throughout Monterey County. "Unfortunately, there's not much we can do."

Though stopping the disease is not possible at this time, the experts said, stopping its spread is possible.

When infected trees are cut down, the infected tree parts should be laid in the sun and covered with a polyurethane sheeting to kill the canker, said David Wood, a professor of entomology at UC-Berkeley.

"Logs should not be transported out of infected areas," he warned. "This is how Dutch elm disease got around."

Pruning is futile, said Thomas Gordon, a professor of plant pathology at UC-Berkeley. In a costly two-year study of four relatively isolated and slightly infected groups of pines — one in Santa Cruz, two in Watsonville and one grove of Monterey pines on Highway 101 near John Street in Salinas — scientists working with the state Department of Transportation attempted to stop the growth of the disease by pruning.

But since not all infected areas show symptoms, the disease spread. By the time the study ended in 1991, all of the trees in each study group, even those not previously infected, had the disease.