

Forest Health Task Force

Responses to Frequently Asked Questions for Removal of Dead or Diseased Trees

The Forest Health Task Force (Task Force) was first created in 2000, to provide information and educational resources to members of the community regarding the Red Gum Lerp Psyllid infestation. After the successful release of a parasitic wasp which was used to control the lerp psyllid, the Task Force was able to suspend their outreach activities. However, the Task force was never formally disbanded.

Unfortunately, the lerp psyllid infestation has become particularly acute this year, affecting potentially thousands of Red Gum Eucalyptus trees in the Rancho Santa Fe area. Therefore, the Task Force has been reestablished with representatives from the Rancho Santa Fe Association, Rancho Santa Fe Foundation, Rancho Santa Fe Fire Protection District, Rancho Santa Fe Fire Safe Council, certified arborists and individual community members.

The Task Force has developed the following list of Frequently Asked Questions, to assist residents in dealing with dead or diseased trees:

1. I received a notice from the Fire Department that I have to remove some large Eucalyptus trees. What do I need to do?

Rancho Santa Fe Fire Protection District (Fire District), through its Vegetation Management Ordinance, has the authority to require the removal of dead or diseased trees, if they are determined to be a fire hazard. If a tree is clearly dead, especially if it is within 100' of your home or 30' of a public road, it should be removed. However, if a tree is infested or otherwise severely stressed and you are unsure about whether it needs to be removed, you can hire a Certified Arborist to provide a written opinion about the health of the tree. The Fire District will review the arborist's report and may delay or rescind their removal order, if warranted.

The Task Force recommends that you contract with a professional tree care company for tree removal or significant pruning. Before signing any contract for tree removal, make sure that the tree company has; 1) a valid contractor's license (C-61, sub-classification D-49), 2) workers compensation insurance for their employees, and 3) liability insurance.

2. How do I know if my Eucalyptus trees are dead?

When a Eucalyptus tree is dead, the bark typically separates (pulls away) from the trunk and branches. This, in addition to the lack of any green color

just under the bark (in the cambium layer) and brown leaves or no leaves, is generally a good indication that the tree is dead.

However, if you have any doubt about whether a tree may still be alive or more importantly may recover, the Task Force recommends that you hire a Certified Arborist.

3. Why am I the only one in my neighborhood who has received a notice from the Fire Department?

Most likely, you are not the only resident in your neighborhood to receive a tree removal notice. However, even if you are the only one to have received a notice, it may simply be that the Fire District has not yet been able to inspect neighboring properties or that some of the trees on your property presented a greater fire hazard than those on adjacent properties.

In this case, the Task Force recommends that you contact the Fire Prevention division of the Fire District at (858) 756-5971. (The name of the Fire Prevention Inspector who issued the notice is located at the bottom of the Fire District's letter.) After contacting a Fire Prevention staff member, please refer to Question #1 for further recommendations.

4. I want to try and save some specific Eucalyptus trees on my property. What can I do?

First, hire a reputable, Certified Arborist to assess the health of the trees in question. An arborist should also be able to advise you about potential treatments like specific watering or pruning techniques. If the arborist works with a Pest Control Advisor (or is a licensed Pest Control Advisor in addition to being an arborist) they can offer advice on the application of a pesticide to help control the lerp psyllid.

However, pesticide applications can be expensive, running anywhere from \$75 to \$100 per treatment, per tree. You should also be aware that the success of such treatments varies considerably, depending on individual circumstances. Generally, pesticides used to control the lerp psyllid are injected directly into the trunk or into the soil immediately adjacent to the tree. These applications tend to be most successful in the spring or winter months, when soil moisture levels are higher.

5. Why aren't the wasps working?

Studies conducted in association with the University of California Cooperative Extension do show that the parasitic wasps have been and continue to be an effective biological control for the lerp psyllid. Typically, the effects of lerp psyllid infestations can be seen beginning in the late

spring or early summer. But, parasitic wasps tend to be the most active when the weather warms up from about the middle of summer until early fall. In other words, the lerp psyllid gets a head start on the wasp, but the wasp catches up a few months later.

Unfortunately, the combined effects of the lerp psyllid, prolonged drought conditions and other Eucalyptus pests such as the Longhorned Borer, can simply overwhelm a tree's natural defense mechanisms even when those are augmented with other biological (e.g., parasitic wasps) and chemical defenses.

Finally, while there is not yet definitive evidence one way or the other on this, some of the oldest Eucalyptus trees in Rancho Santa Fe may be nearing the end of their natural life span, having been first planted around 1906, by the Santa Fe Railroad.

6. Can't we release more wasps into the area?

The first parasitic wasps were imported from Australia and are no longer available. Fortunately, field studies conducted in association with the University of California, have confirmed that the wasp is still present in the area in sufficient concentrations to help control the lerp psyllid.

7. Do I need approval from the Association to cut trees on my property?

Yes, in some cases. Paragraph 11 of the Protective Covenant states that written approval from the Association is required prior to removal of any tree over 5' high and located within 25' of a public road. Moreover, if your property has an approved landscape plan, Association approval is required prior to removing any trees shown on that plan. *This approval is required even if you received a notice from the Fire District to remove dead or diseased Eucalyptus trees.* If Association approval is required, the Task Force recommends that you notify the Fire District as well, in case any further coordination between the two organizations is needed.

Association staff can generally provide written approval within a few hours of receiving a request from a member. If you have a more specific question about approval to remove a tree from a property located within the Covenant boundaries, please contact the Association offices at (858) 756-1174.

8. How do I know if the trees to be removed are on my property or in the County right-of-way for a public road?

First, if the trees are located in the public right-of-way, the responsibility for pruning or removal rests with the Rancho Santa Fe Community Services District (CSD).

Determining if trees are located on your property or in the right-of-way can be difficult if property corner (survey) markers are not readily visible. The only way to be absolutely certain as to the location of a specific tree is to hire a Licensed Land Surveyor to mark the property corners and the property lines in the area where the tree is located. In many cases however, the Association's Facilities Maintenance Department, in their role as the roadside maintenance contractor for the CSD, may know the approximate location of the edge of the right-of-way.

If your property is located within the Covenant boundaries, the Task Force recommends that you first contact the Association offices at (858) 756-1174, if you have a question about whether a tree is located on your property or in the right-of-way. Ultimately, if the Facilities Department is unsure of the right-of-way location, a partial property line survey may be required to determine ownership of the tree in question.

9. Which tree company should I hire?

The Fire District maintains a list of Vegetation Management Contractors who have done work in the Rancho Santa Fe Area and are licensed and insured. Neither the Task Force nor the Fire District makes any guarantee as to the current license and insurance status, ability, or credentials of an individual or firm shown on the list. The link to the Contractor list is shown below:

http://www.rsf-fire.org/assets/documents/prevention/resources/vegetation_management_contractors.pdf

10. What is the Association doing to prevent the loss of more trees?

On July 2, 2009, at the request of the Association Board, Mr. David Shaw, a Farm Advisor with the University of California Cooperative Extension, provided an update on the status of the lerp psyllid infestation in the Rancho Santa Fe area. Subsequently, on July 16, 2009, the Association Board of Directors adopted several recommendations related to improving the health of the Eucalyptus forest.

In the near term, the recommendations call for the development of educational materials to address acute issues, such as how to assess the health of diseased Eucalyptus trees and possible treatment options (as discussed in questions 2 and 4 above).

Long term solutions include moving away from a 'monoculture' type of forest, to one that includes a mix of different types of trees. The Task Force is currently developing a list of trees that would be suitable to replace dead or dying Eucalyptus trees. The list will include trees of a similar scale and size to the Red Gum and will continue to feature other varieties of Eucalyptus, which have become an iconic symbol of Rancho Santa Fe.

Introducing different types of trees into the forest will admittedly take years to accomplish. Once established however, the mixed Eucalyptus and evergreen forest will be much less susceptible to the type of devastation that we are currently seeing from the red gum lerp psyllid.

11. What should I do if I receive a notice for tree removal from the Fire Department, but can't afford to remove the trees?

The Task Force recommends that you contact the Fire Prevention division of the Rancho Santa Fe Fire Protection District at (858) 756-5971, as soon as possible, to set up a schedule for tree removal where only the highest priority tree or trees would be removed immediately and the remaining trees removed over a longer period of time. Please be aware however, that such an agreement, if allowed, would be at the sole discretion of the Fire District.

If you have received a notice and cannot afford to remove dead or diseased Eucalyptus trees, the Fire District has the authority to conduct a forced abatement and remove the trees. However, the costs for the tree removal, plus an administrative charge, will then be placed on your property tax bill.

Unfortunately, at this point in time, the Task Force is not aware of any grant funds for tree removal. If such funds become available in the future, the Task Force will work with the local news media on how to apply for funding assistance.

This list of Frequently Asked Questions will be updated from time to time, as additional questions arise.