
CAL FIRE NEWS RELEASE

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection



CONTACT: Scott A. McLean
(916) 651-FIRE (3473)

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Tree Mortality Task Force Continues Efforts To Curb Dangers Of Massive Tree Die Off

State, federal, local agencies focus on highest-hazard areas

Sacramento – In response to the massive tree die off across California—which the U.S. Forest Service today estimated has killed over 102 million trees since 2010—CAL FIRE is continuing its work with federal, local, and utility partners to remove dead and dying trees that pose the greatest risk to public safety.

"Although the epidemic tree mortality we are facing is devastating, it has galvanized partnerships at all levels, and focused renewed interests on forest health," said Chief Ken Pimlott, CAL FIRE director and California's state forester. "With disaster comes opportunity, and we will continue our work to remove the dead and dying trees that pose the greatest risk to public safety and private property."

To date, CAL FIRE and its partners have removed more than 423,000 trees in 10 counties, inspected and cleared of dead trees nearly 52,000 miles of roads and powerlines, treated more than 26,000 acres and created roughly 1,300 acres of fuel breaks.

"The number of dead trees in our state is truly saddening and another widespread impact of this historic drought we are managing in our state," said Mark Ghilarducci, director of the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services. "Through the Governor's Tree Mortality Task Force, we're actively leveraging all of our resources around California to ensure protection of lives, critical infrastructure and the environment in our wooded communities and wildlands."

Stakeholders working through the Governor's Tree Mortality Task Force committed to redouble their efforts in the face of an expanding epidemic of trees killed by drought and bark beetles. On November 18, the U.S. Forest Service increased its estimate of the number of dead trees in California's forestlands from 66 million to 102 million, greatly widening the estimated scope of a die-off unprecedented in modern history. The estimated 36 million dead trees identified by the U.S. Forest Service in its latest aerial surveys will heighten the danger of falling trees and wildfire for years to come.

California has endured five years of drought, 2012-15 are the four driest consecutive years on record, based on statewide precipitation – and drought continues despite improved precipitation in Northern California last winter. Drought is a frequent and natural feature of California’s Mediterranean climate, and the state’s highest economic losses due to drought typically involve loss of timberland and wildfire damage. Healthy trees typically produce enough resinous pitch to repel bark beetles, but beetle populations can flourish among stands of trees stressed by lack of precipitation. The beetles and their larvae feed on the tree’s living tissue. Beetle-damaged trees can take down powerlines, damage homes and fuel wildfire.

Over \$10 million in state funds have been earmarked in grants for local projects to help combat tree mortality, focusing on the removal of dead and dying trees around homes. Another \$6 million of state funds have been used to buy equipment for removing dead and dying trees in high-hazard zones. Ten counties stretching from Placer to Kern have been identified as the highest-hazard region for tree mortality.

“Work to address this massive bark beetle epidemic began quickly a year ago, and the joint undertaking continues,” said Mariposa County Supervisor Kevin Cann. “The sheer number of dead trees is hard to imagine, but it’s real and we must continue our efforts to address the fact that this will be an ongoing issue for years to come. We have come a long way since Governor Brown first declared this emergency. It is important that we recognize the substantial progress as we redouble our efforts to deal with this ecosystem impacting event.”

In October 2015, Governor Brown signed an [executive order](#) addressing tree mortality, including the creation of a [Tree Mortality Task Force](#). More than 80 local, state and federal agencies, as well as utilities and other stakeholders, focus on a coordinated response through the task force.

Additional information on the work of the task force to date can be found [here](#).

For more information on how to be ready for wildfire and to learn how to make your trees healthy and prepared for bark beetles, visit www.ReadyForWildfire.org.

MEDIA NOTES

High resolution photos of tree mortality, bark beetles and education graphics:
<https://calfire.box.com/s/kjq6jowwyy1s53swumg9oa76bz0zz86v>

Video of crews working to remove dead trees:
https://drive.google.com/open?id=0Bx_D8oAj6JzmR25BcUIwQIVJSWc

Tree Mortality B-Roll:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/0Bx_D8oAj6JzmbHRvSIF2TEJZbEk/view?usp=sharing