Sudden Oak Death Firefighting Briefing Paper

What is Sudden Oak Death (SOD)?

SOD is caused by a non-native pathogen (*Phytophthora ramorum*) that was introduced into California through the nursery trade. The pathogen kills tanoaks and some oak species (coast live oak, Shreve oak, black oak, canyon oak) and not others (valley oak, blue oak). It spreads mainly in wind-driven rain events on California bay laurel leaves, which are not harmed by the pathogen. It can be transmitted through the air, in surface water, plant material and soil.

Why should you care?

As of 2014, it is estimated that over 1 million trees have died from Monterey County, California to Curry County, Oregon. SOD has dramatically increased fuel loads, mainly along coastal areas, and the pathogen is slowly spreading inland. You can help prevent further pathogen spread by following decontamination instructions found below.

What to know when fighting fire in areas affected by SOD:

- **Beware of the increased snag danger. Consider not staffing the line at night.**
  High numbers of standing dead trees present:
  - Hazards to personnel
  - Sources of embers
  - Rolling logs as trees fall to the ground
- **Recently dead/dying trees with their leaves still attached create ladder fuels.**
  Dry leaves retained on recently dead trees have extremely low fuel moisture content and create ladder fuels that can lead to localized torching.
- **Difficulty in fireline construction.** As a dead standing tree falls apart and to the ground, it creates an intricate, tangled lattice of large and small debris. This may make line establishment impossible. You may need to consider re-routing fire lines around heavy slash.
- **Increased resistance to control**. With all the additional fuel on the ground (especially more 1000 hour fuels), fires may burn longer and be more difficult to put out.

DO NOT BRING IT HOME!

- **Decontamination:** Take every precaution to not spread the pathogen by leaving mud and plant matter on-site whenever possible. Be sure to thoroughly clean tools, the undercarriage of engines, the mud off your boots, and any debris in wildland gear bags.

Information provided by UC Davis. For more information about SOD go to www.suddenoakdeath.org.