PRIORITIES FOR ACTION
AUGUST 21, 2001

The Biomass Utilization Committee would like to share a vision of what the landscape could be like in some years hence if we act now to address the immediate issues and opportunities. Our committee envisions a set of prioritized tasks that will respond to a rising level of information so as to develop on-the-ground strategies for utilizing and disposing of SODS infected material.

Once complete, (hopefully within four years) these projects could serve as a template for other biomass-laden communities to solve their own problems through cooperation and coordination with governmental agencies. The opportunity exists to create problem solving infrastructures and methodologies where they do not now exist. The current and evolving SODS driven challenges will allow these new approaches to be field tested and improved over time.

The critical initial effort should be the expedited inventory of existing SODS infected material. In order to get a more comprehensive, real time picture of the SODS scope and scale it is imperative that all eight counties be included in the inventory research. Using the model developed for the Marin County inventory, currently underway through the UC Forest Products Lab (UCFPL), the first step is to fully fund inventory efforts in all infected counties Project 1 on the attached spreadsheet. Once the volumes of infected material that need to be removed are known, the proper scope and scale of operations for removal can be determined. To do this will require the results from the utilization study currently underway by UCFPL. The type of solid wood volume as well as the quality and physical properties of the range of biomass materials available will determine the safest (relative to potential spread of infection) and best use for this material.

Whatever the findings in these two ongoing projects, SODS biomass will require sanitary methods that must be certified by the California Dept. of Food and Agriculture in order to handle, transport, and dispose/utilize material destined for removal. Some of these approaches are being tested, but these tests must be expanded and ongoing to ensure that Phytophthora free products are being produced. Sonoma Compost and Dr. Garbelotto are seeking funding to research the viability of using composting techniques to rid infected material of Phytophthora – Project 2. This research could lead to procedures that are “certifiable “as appropriate for organic recycling yards. The primary objective for certification should be the safe removal and utilization of SODS infected material so as to:

- minimize spread of infection
- maximize opportunities for appropriate utilization
- minimize material destined for landfill
maximize value added opportunities to help offset costs of removal

demonstrate viable processes for producing value-added products

create incentives for land managers, tree service companies, arborists, foresters, etc. to deliver SODS infected material to certified, regulated concentration yards

minimize costs of removal – keep removal protocols/guidelines simple and consider reduced tip fees at concentration yards

The protocols developed for the sanitary and safe handling of infected material in the field are a critical portion of the plan that will require careful forethought and planning. If private and/or public landowners within zones of infestation decide that removal is their best management option then the removal protocols/guidelines need to be based on best management practices and the latest science available. The removal guides should utilize, whenever possible, standard field procedures involving arborists, foresters and tree service companies.

The next step, field processing and transport, will take infected material from the field to a certified concentration yard – preferably an existing organic recycling center. Various options for delivering infected material to end users need to be explored Project 3. For example moving material to a concentration yard located close to infection centers would minimize transport distance, costs and minimize potential spread of infection.

Unfortunately, much of the area impacted by SODS infection does not currently have sanitary means for removal, and transport of infected material. To address this concern, priority should be given to methods that can effectively process large quantities of infected material in a short period of time, close to the infected areas. Project 4 offers one option to address the need to support these operations with mobile equipment and crew, which could then operate on a very local basis for several weeks before moving to other infected areas. In this way, material within an infection zone could be transported with local means (even homeowners with pickup trucks), to temporary concentration yards. Once the concentration yard has accumulated sufficient quantities of infected material, mobile processing equipment could then be dispatched to the yard to properly process and then transport product to end markets for final utilization.

Existing organic recycling facilities which currently offer composting services need assistance in the form of information -Project 5 regarding value added market opportunities for the infected material. In this way, the added value of material processed will offset some the increased expenses of sanitary and certified procedures necessary to handle infected material. Priority funding should be made available to research the value added opportunities for infected
material - Project 6. Value added markets that would be considered include: solid wood products, densified wood products, composite boards and energy generation.

Due to the current energy deficit situation in the West, utilization of infected material for energy generation appears favorable. Incineration of infected material also ensures sanitary disposal. Project # 7 provides seed money for the demonstration and start up of feasibility studies to assess opportunities for distributed energy projects fired on infected material.

The Biomass Utilization Committee respectfully submits these projects for your consideration. The Committee is hopeful, now that funding is finally available for implementation, that we can move ahead with addressing the extremely serious challenges.