CALIFORNIA OAK MORTALITY TASK FORCE

News Release

SUDDEN OAK DEATH IS ON THE RISE ACCORDING TO LARGE-SCALE CITIZEN SCIENTIST SURVEY

Date: October 2, 2011

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BERKELEY—Sudden Oak Death (SOD) has increased dramatically in areas surveyed by citizen scientists in 2011, according to results from the fourth annual SOD Blitz released today by UC Berkeley. The effort revealed increases up to three-fold of SOD infection levels compared to 2010 data.

SOD Blitz is one of the largest citizen scientist events in the country, with approximately 500 participants taking part in the campaign, gathering nearly 10,000 samples from 2,000 trees covering at least 50,000 acres of California woodlands and parks. Besides a higher than expected infection level in the San Francisco Peninsula, other noteworthy findings included the pervasive infestation in densely populated western hill slopes of the San Francisco East Bay, the infestation of Carmel Valley Village, and the world-famous Napa Valley having infected trees on the valley floor for the first time.

"These findings not only help us to understand how the disease is spreading, but they also provide a valuable tool for homeowners, landowners, and communities, allowing them to have real-time information about their proximity to known infestations so that they can make strategic decisions about how best to protect their property. Data generated by SOD Blitzes are made public by the local media and on the Internet, allowing hundreds of thousands of residents to benefit from the results," said Matteo Garbelotto, head of the UC Berkeley Forest Pathology and Mycology laboratory which organizes the Blitzes.

Sixteen different 2011 spring SOD Blitzes were organized in Humboldt, Sonoma, Napa, Alameda, Contra Costa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, and Monterey Counties. In this grassroots outreach effort arranged by local organizers in cooperation with UC Berkeley, and endorsed by the US Forest Service and the National Science Foundation, participants were all carefully trained to identify SOD symptoms on California bay laurel and tanoak leaves and to properly record sample locations during the 2-day long surveys. Within 48 hours of collection,

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samples were processed by the Garbelotto lab to determine the presence or absence of *Phytophthora ramorum*, the pathogen known to cause SOD. Results, including maps showing the distribution of the disease, were publicized with the help of the SF Chronicle and are available online at http://nature.berkeley.edu/garbelotto/english/sodblitzresults2011.php (red indicates positive trees, while green indicates trees negative for the pathogen). The Garbelotto lab provides a variety of follow-up activities, including local meetings, hands-on training sessions, and workshops to help people interpret the results and understand recommended management options. Community members in infested counties should consult the 2011 Blitz map online, and are recommended to treat oaks and remove small infectious bay laurel trees this November if their neighborhood was surveyed and an infected tree was found within a mile of their property.

"SOD Blitzes are an integral part of our understanding of the distribution of SOD. Without citizen scientists, we could never accomplish a survey of this scale as the resources just aren't available to do so. Blitzes are a win-win situation, as community members who participate also learn about the disease epidemiology and how to prevent its spread," said Garbelotto. "Based on our knowledge of disease distribution, only people with trees in the vicinity of confirmed hotspots are advised to start treatments, helping to avoid unnecessary expenses and habitat modifications."

SOD, a serious exotic disease, is threatening the survival of tanoak and several oak species in California. Currently it is found in the wildlands of 14 coastal California counties, from Monterey to Humboldt; however, it is very patchy in distribution, even in highly infested areas. Symptomatic California bay laurel leaves are often the first sign that SOD has arrived at a location, and generally precedes oak infections. Some management options are available (sanitation, chemical preventative treatments, selective bay removal), but they are effective only if implemented before oaks and tanoaks are infected; hence, timely detection of the disease is key for a successful, proactive attempt to slow down the SOD epidemic.

For more information on SOD Blitzes and how to organize one, upcoming community meetings, or SOD treatment training sessions, go to www.matteolab.org. For more information on SOD, go to www.suddenoakdeath.org or contact Katie Palmieri at (510) 847-5482 or kpalmieri@berkeley.edu.

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