



Prevention is the key to decreasing Oak Wilt spread

TFS Urges Caution When Selecting and Transporting Oak Firewood

December 5, 2005

AUSTIN, Texas – Texas Forest Service is encouraging Texans to be careful when collecting and purchasing firewood at this time of year. Transporting and storing diseased wood is a known means of spreading the devastating oak wilt fungus to previously uninfected neighborhoods. Utilizing these prevention steps is the key to safeguarding against spreading the disease through the selection and use of firewood:

- **Select well-seasoned firewood.** Well-seasoned wood is cut before the summer and is typically dry with loose bark and cracked ends. Avoid oak wood that appears unseasoned, that may have tight bark and cut ends which show no cracks or signs of aging. The extreme heat and drying of a full Texas summer effectively destroys the fungus in cut firewood.
- **Safely store unknown sources of firewood.** If the oak wood comes from an unknown source and it is not well seasoned, cover the woodpile with a clear piece of plastic. Burying the edges of the plastic will prevent the entry or exit of insects that might have been attracted to diseased wood and fungal mats.
- **Destroy diseased red oaks.** A knowledgeable arborist or forester should diagnose red oaks (i.e., Spanish, Texas red, blackjack or shumard oak) that die rapidly (2-3 weeks) or in groups (2 or more trees over several years) for oak wilt. Trees suspected to have died recently from oak wilt should be destroyed by burning, burying or chipping. The heat of a fire destroys the fungus and the smoke emitted poses no threat to healthy trees. When planning to do any outdoor burning, be sure you check with local officials to see if an outdoor burning ban is in place for your county and take care **not** to burn on windy days with low humidity.
- **Avoid wounding oaks during vulnerable seasons.** The general recommendation is to avoid injuries to oaks from February through June. The best times for pruning of oaks are during the heat of summer (minimal spore production) or the cold of winter (minimal insect activity).
- **Paint all oak wounds including pruning cuts.** Throughout the year, immediately apply a thin coat of latex or pruning paint to all fresh wounds and other injuries that expose the inner bark or sapwood of oaks. This prevents contaminated sap beetles from infecting the wound with oak wilt spores.

Oak firewood is an important commodity to Texans, whether it's used for firing up the barbecue pit or for warming up the home on a cold winter's day. By selecting well-seasoned, disease-free firewood and by following other disease prevention guidelines, homeowners are taking the correct steps to prevent a new oak wilt disease outbreak in their neighborhood. Visit <http://texasforestservicetamu.edu/forest/oakwilt/default.asp> or www.texasoakwilt.org for more information, or call the TFS/Lower Colorado River Authority's Oak Wilt Hotline-512-473-3517.