Austin Oak Wilt Management Policy Proposal

Proposed by the Urban Forestry Board, Sept. 15, 2010

Oak Wilt infections start when the Oak Wilt fungus *Ceratocystis fagacearum* invades the water conducting system of Oak trees. Initial infections are almost always caused above ground by the *nitidulid* carrier beetle transferring the fungus from Red Oak fungal mats or infected firewood to fresh wounds/cuts caused by pruning, storms, animals, construction or accidents. Once infected, the Oak Wilt fungus quickly spreads underground through the interconnected root systems of Oak trees.

The main emphasis of this policy is on **PREVENTION**, and research has identified best practices* to prevent and contain Oak Wilt.

The first step to prevent initial infections is simply to not prune/wound Oaks during the carrier beetle's peak activity season, which is from February through June for Central Texas. There are seven other months to schedule pruning Oaks outside the dangerous carrier beetle's season. Pruning during the spring growth season also promotes sucker growth which demands additional pruning. The ideal pruning season is the coldest months (November through January) when growth is dormant and the carrier beetles are inactive. Property owners are encouraged to plan ahead and work with certified arborists to develop long term tree management plans.

Additional best practices include (1) always sterilizing tools with bleach/alcohol, (2) immediately painting all wounds/cuts with black pruning paint or latex paint regardless of season, (3) immediately removing infected Red Oaks, (4) destroying infected firewood and planting resistant trees.

In the event that infections develop, property owners should work with Texas Oak Wilt Certified Arborists to develop containment plans to prevent Oak Wilt from spreading through the interconnected root systems into the neighborhood. Techniques include trenching zones at least 4 feet deep and 100 feet beyond the perimeter of infected trees and removing infected trees. In some cases, fungicide injections can be used to treat individual trees, but fungicide treatment of individual trees does not stop the spread of the disease from tree to tree. Only breaking all root connections can stop the tree-to-tree spread of oak wilt.

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* Reference: How To Identify and Manage Oak Wilt in Texas, US Forest Service How-To SR-1, June 2005.