

CITY OF AUSTIN

OAK WILT PREVENTION POLICY

1.0 Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this Oak Wilt Prevention Policy is to identify measures that city staff and city-hired contractors and their sub-contractors, who perform the services of removing or trimming trees, will take to prevent the spread of oak wilt.

2.0 Definitions

Oak Wilt Disease: A tree disease caused by the fungus, *Ceratocystis fagacearum*. The fungus infects the vascular system of a tree. The vascular system contains vessels which transport moisture throughout the tree. The vessels of an infected tree effectively become blocked by the infection of the fungus, and cannot transport adequate moisture to sustain a healthy or living tree. In most cases, the end result is tree mortality.

3.0 Prevention Policy

- 3.1 Prior to beginning field work, all city staff associated with projects involving potential contact with oak trees shall be made aware of the city's official Oak Wilt Policy by receiving and reading a written copy of this policy. Staff receiving a written copy of the policy shall include, but not limited to, project managers, equipment operators responsible for removing or trimming trees, or operators using heavy equipment which could cause wounding of susceptible oaks in the use of the equipment. In addition, individual city departments will provide a written copy of the Oak Wilt Policy to contractors participating in city projects in areas where oak trees are present before initiating field work.
- 3.2 When possible, city staff and contractors should avoid trimming or pruning Live oaks and Red oaks (Spanish, Shumard, Texas Red, and Blackjack oaks) from Feb 1 to June 30.
- 3.3 At all times and irrespective of limb size, all cuts and wounds to oak trees shall be dressed immediately using a non-phytotoxic tree wound dressing. Stump cuts and damaged roots (both above and below ground) shall also be dressed.
- 3.4 Disinfection of pruning tools, saws, and related equipment is mandatory during the trimming or pruning of oak trees. Disinfection of tree removal and trimming equipment shall occur before work begins in a project area, between work in individual oak trees, and again prior to leaving a project area. Acceptable disinfectants include either aerosol disinfectant or a 10 percent bleach-water solution.

*NOTE: Although this policy would require the disinfection of pruning equipment before and between oak trees as a precaution, research does not substantiate disinfection as a means of preventing the transmission of the oak wilt disease.

4.0 Disposal Policy

- 4.1 Chipping or shredding the wood from infected trees to use as mulch is an acceptable means of recycling the wood. Chipping or shredding allows the wood to dry out quickly, thereby killing the fungus.
- 4.2 Burning diseased wood is an acceptable means of disposal. Burning diseased logs will kill the fungus, and the fungus will not spread with the smoke.

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- 4.3 Logs from diseased Red Oaks, that are not chipped, shredded, or burned shall be disposed of at a landfill.
- 4.4 Firewood from diseased Red oak trees shall *not* be stored near healthy trees where fungal spores or insects that carry the spores have the potential to spread the fungus to healthy trees. It is recommended to store oak firewood under a sheet of clear plastic, tightly sealing the edges of plastic with soil or bricks. Doing so will prevent any spore carrying beetles from escaping and will solarize and heat the stored firewood to speed the drying process. It is also recommended to use clear plastic, as black plastic will reveal any escape holes to the beetles.
- 4.5 In situations where diseased Red oak trees are identified and are not accessible for chipping, shredding, or removal, the trunk of the diseased tree should be girdled, and the stem treated with an appropriate herbicide to deaden the tree and hasten the desiccation and drying of the wood below the minimum moisture content that could support the development of fungal spores.