

RANCHO SANTA FE
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FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT
Rancho Santa Fe, California 92067-0410

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FIRE DISTRICT ACTIVELY SENDING VIOLATION NOTICES TO REMOVE DEAD AND DISEASED EUCALYPTUS

RANCHO SANTA FE, Calif. — In an effort to protect lives and property, the Rancho Santa Fe Fire Protection District (fire district) is vigorously working to eliminate hazardous trees within the district and bring properties within compliance of existing fire codes. Over the last few years, the fire district has seen a dramatic increase in the amount of tree mortality, brought on by prolonged drought, insect infestation, and disease. These changes have led to an increased fire hazard that threatens homes and communities within the fire district boundaries. Within the last few months, tree mortality has skyrocketed and the problem in the eucalyptus forest has become very evident. The fire district is actively inspecting properties within the western part of the fire district.

Historically, the eucalyptus forests created a rural, peaceful setting for those living in Rancho Santa Fe. Unfortunately, these once celebrated trees have now become a fire hazard. "It is the responsibility of the Fire District to identify and address fire hazards within our communities," said Tony Michel, Fire Chief. "We are working aggressively to mitigate the threat posed by the dead and diseased trees within our Fire District. This effort is paramount for the safety of our communities." Approximately 90% of the dead or diseased trees are on private property. The fire district is sending out violation notices to all homeowners, property owners, and public areas within the fire district. This is a priority for the fire district. "Unfortunately, we have property owners that believe their trees still have a chance for recovery or that their trees are not dead. If a resident receives a violation notice for dead or diseased trees, that tree has been identified as a fire hazard and must be removed. If the property owner fails to remove the dead or diseased tree, the fire district will force abate the fire hazard within the perimeters of the fire code," said Michel.

"The Fire Prevention Bureau has been sending out abatement notices to residents for these dead and diseased eucalyptus trees," explained Conor Lenehan, Urban Forester for the fire district. "We are

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targeting dead, dying and diseased eucalyptus trees that are within 100' of a structure or within 20' of a roadway or driveway. We are also encouraging homeowners to remove any additional dead or diseased eucalyptus trees that are beyond these parameters. This will help minimize the fire hazard in the community, and allow safer passage on evacuation routes throughout the fire district."

Following increased inspections throughout the district, property owners with diseased trees on their land have been notified via mail that the afflicted trees shall be removed. Additionally, property owners with trees that have debris such as peeling bark or dead limbs hanging from them will receive a notice to clean up the trees, thereby reducing the fire hazard and ladder fuels. The District will first be looking to address those diseased trees that are in close proximity to structures and roadways, and then, where needed, move on to trees further away. Resources such as potential tree removal companies and replacement tree suggestions will be available.

Many homeowners within the fire district have already received notice and begun the tree removal process. "We realize there are a lot of trees that need to be removed and it will be very costly to the homeowners," says Lenehan. "We know this is a large undertaking and appreciate the community's cooperation as we strive to minimize potential fire hazards within the district. If you received a notice from us or not, we would be more than happy to meet with homeowners on their properties and identify dead and dying eucalyptus tree for you." said Lenehan

The fire district will continue making inspections and working with property owners to abate the diseased trees and other hazards. If you have a concern about something that cannot be seen from the public roadway, please contact the fire prevention bureau to make an appointment for an inspection.

Fire prevention efforts do not stop with tree removal. During a presentation to the RSF Association Board earlier this month, Bill Beckman, Chair of the local Committee on the Natural Environment (CONE), outlined the group's plan to engage the community to facilitate the removal of trees as well as the planting of more drought-resistant trees to repopulate the forest, stressing the importance of the community as a whole to take action. The Rancho Santa Fe Association (RSFA) is also working toward removing the dead and diseased eucalyptus trees. "Our number one priority is the preservation of the historic community character while maintaining a safe and sustainable environment for the residents," added Arnold Keene, Field Operations Manager for the RSFA. "Over the last decade our workload has shifted substantially to focus on the removal and thinning of trees and plants due to drought conditions and insect infestation throughout the region with a renewed focus on the reduction of potential fire fuel in

dense roadside landscaping and in the many open space areas throughout the Covenant. The RSFFPD and the RSF Association have worked closely to accomplish a fire safe community and will continue to work hard toward this common goal.”

“This is not just a private property issue, this is a community issue that needs to be addressed,” concluded Michel. “I cannot stress enough how important the removal of the dead and diseased trees is for the safety of the community. While the fire district can assist in preventing wildfires, we cannot eliminate them and it is important for each homeowner to take responsibility of their own property. They will occur; and when they do, that's where our prevention efforts pay off. Fire Prevention is our communities first line of defense. The fire district is fully committed to making this a reality.”

For more information regarding tree removal and vegetation management, or if you have questions or concerns regarding a property, please contact the Fire Prevention Bureau at 858-756-5971. More wildfire prevention tips are available on our web site at www.rsfire.org.

The mission of the Rancho Santa Fe Fire Protection District is “To serve the public through the protection of life, environment and property from fire and other emergencies through prevention, preparedness, education, and response.” Formed in 1946, the fire district now spans approximately 50-square miles and protects over 33,000 citizens. The fire district currently operates out of six fire stations and serves the communities within and surrounding Rancho Santa Fe, Fairbanks Ranch, 4S-Ranch, Del Dios, Elfin Forest, and Harmony Grove.

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Photo Caption: It is possible for trees to have leaves on them, or for leaves to re-sprout, and still be diseased and dying. Other trees have simply reached the end of their life cycle. Trees such as these within 20 feet of roadways or 100 feet of structures will be required to be removed.