

Talking Points for When You See Out-of-Season Pruning of a Live Oak or Red Oak

Have you seen a contractor's workers pruning a live oak or a red oak from February 1 through June 30? Professionals should know better, but unscrupulous "tree trimmers" apparently don't know or don't care.

Do you have a new neighbor who might not know about Oak Wilt and the risk it poses to your neighborhood's oaks? About ten percent of NWACA homeowners are new to the neighborhood each year.

Pruning live oaks and red oaks between February and June doesn't just threaten the trees being pruned. It's also the greatest human-caused risk to surrounding oaks. That's why **you're justified in politely speaking to any neighbor who prunes or allows others to prune their oaks out of season.** Here are some talking points:

- They're risking exposing their oaks **and their neighbors' oaks** to oak wilt fungus. Fungicide treatment of infected *live oaks* is often successful, but always costly. Wilt-infected *red oaks* always die; there is no successful treatment.
- The oak wilt fungus can be transmitted to healthy oaks by insects which are attracted to the sap that's around any natural or human-caused cut or wound to the bark of a tree.
- A particular beetle that's a common transmitter is most active February to June.
- Wilt-infected red oaks develop 'fungal mats' under loosened bark where the beetle picks up the fungus. It can then transmit fungus to another red oak or a live oak when it contacts the sap at a cut.
- Pruning cuts (any time of year) should be painted over *immediately*. Cut-paint-cut-paint. It's virtually impossible to go through a tree canopy making pruning cuts and then go back and find all those cuts to be painted.
- Untrained workers and/or unscrupulous contractors likely don't sterilize their cutting tools before moving from one tree to another. If they don't, they can spread the fungus more dependably than the beetle.
- Cutting tools should be sterilized with 30% bleach or lysol solution before pruning begins, and then when moving from one tree to another.
- Even though insects are less active in the heat of summer (after June), the trees are still growing. Summer pruning causes new growth, typically called suckers, along the trunk and large branches. These don't enhance the natural appearance of the tree or add to the tree canopy where growth is most productive. It's best to prune only November thru January.
- Your oaks probably benefit from pruning only every five years or so, and then only to remove limbs that are too close to a structure or power line, too low, broken, or rubbing another limb.

That's the technical stuff. The typical NWACA property owner will probably be logical and shocked that they have been so gullible to have exposed their oak trees and their neighbors' oak trees to oak wilt.

Still not convinced? Maybe you're talking to more of a numbers person?

- Removal of a large tree can easily cost \$1,000 - \$2,000, and certainly more if it overhangs a

home, pool, other trees, valued landscaping or fencing, or if access is limited.

- Lost shade on a rooftop or window wall will substantially increase cooling costs (\$\$\$).
- The loss of shade will likely change landscape water demand (\$\$\$) and require different plant choices (\$\$\$).
- The replacement of a large tree with a large tree will cost additional thousands (\$\$\$).
- The loss of trees will normally reduce the market value of a home (\$\$\$).
- NWACA residents have already lost hundreds of live oaks and red oaks over several decades, incurring both the dollar costs, intangible losses and diminished values described above.
- Our NWACA neighbors have spent over \$500,000 on trenching to contain oak wilt outbreaks.

Beyond the biology and the big bucks (\$\$\$), let's be good neighbors.

- Picture your home without some of the oak trees in your yard or in mine.
- Our live oaks are probably connected more than we know (through grafted roots).
- You watch out for my oaks and I'll watch out for yours.

If you can't reach a homeowner while pruning is going on, ask a worker for the name and phone number of the crew supervisor (not the on-site foreman). The supervisor might be supervising multiple work crews. Remember, workers are only following orders. They might be open to your comments but are not likely to do or not do much at your request. If there's a language barrier, look for a company name on a vehicle. Persist until you can speak to the supervisor, the business owner or the homeowner.

SAVE THIS. If it's hard to catch your neighbor, this can help you compose your own polite but direct, specific note to incorporate the points above that you think matter the most.