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Article courtesy of Nick Polanin, Agriculture & Resource Management Agent
 Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Somerset County. See background and resources below
 article.

Article:

Thursday, March 11, 2004 (SF Chronicle): Peter Fimrite, Chronicle Staff Writer

CALIFORNIA/ Nursery reports oak disease/Infested plants have been sold out of
 state -- scientists shocked

Ornamental plants in the largest nursery in California -- a place that
 distributes flora around the country -- have been infested with spores from
 the tree-killing disease known as sudden oak death, it was revealed
 Wednesday.

The discovery of **Phytophthora ramorum in camellias at Monrovia Growers in
 Azusa (Los Angeles County) means that the highly contagious disease has been
 transported to other states and may have been introduced into highly
 susceptible oak forests in places like the southeastern United States.**

The news hit like an earthquake as forest pathologists from around the
 world gathered Wednesday at Sonoma State University for a California Oak
 Mortality Task Force meeting.

"It's a huge nursery with thousands of plants that went all over the
 place," said Susan Frankel, a U.S. Forest Service plant pathologist who is
 working with the state Department of Food and Agriculture on the problem.
 "Hundreds of nurseries are now going to require inspections. Hundreds of
 thousands of plants will have to be destroyed. We're very concerned for the
 forests of the United States, for the nursery industry and trade. It's
 terrible."

The news of yet another infestation was a major setback after two years
 of progress fighting the fungus-like scourge that has killed tens of
 thousands of California's majestic oaks. The widening swath of destruction
 seemed to have slowed in the past two years, especially in the Bay Area, and
 an effective phosphite treatment was developed and approved for use on
 private trees.

But there were signs of trouble last year when *Phytophthora ramorum*,
 which is the scientific name for the disease, was discovered in camellias in
 a small nursery in Washington.

It meant the disease had spread to another state -- but infestations had
 been found before in nurseries and isolated, so it wasn't yet a disaster.
 However, Frankel said, the camellias were eventually traced back to
 Monrovia. Testing of plants there confirmed Monday that six varieties of
 camellias were infected, the first such infestation in arid Southern
 California.

The major concern is that the 500-acre nursery does \$30 million annually

in out-of-state shipments, Frankel said, and many of the plants sent out over the past year may have been infected. That means they may serve as hosts and spread the disease to wildland areas.

Steve Oak, a forest pathologist for the North Carolina office of the U.S. Forest Service, said a great many of Monrovia's plants are shipped to the southeast, including places near the southern Appalachian Mountains, where Northern red oak trees make up 80 percent of the forest canopy in some places.

"We have a pathway that was theoretical before, but is now likely," he said during a break in Wednesday's conference. "The threat is very real."

It is especially troubling in that region because the oaks there replaced the forests of American chestnut trees killed in one of the worst blights in world history.

The chestnut blight, first discovered in 1904, killed some 3.5 billion trees in 50 years, essentially wiping out the entire species.

Steve Lyle, spokesman for the California Department of Food and Agriculture, said lab samples are being taken and analyzed to determine how extensive the Monrovia infestation is. "Surveying is ongoing at other nurseries in California as well to see if the fungus has spread even further," Lyle said. Katie Bloome, the spokeswoman for Monrovia Growers, said shipments of all plants that are susceptible to sudden oak death have been halted and she is confident the problem can be eradicated. "We're on top of it," she said.

Meanwhile, forest pathologists from the United Kingdom and the Netherlands outlined during the conference how *Phytophthora ramorum* has spread from nursery plants to forested areas. It seems to be especially deadly for beech and red oak trees in Europe.

Curiously, the microbe in Europe -- which was recently also found in the Pacific Northwest -- is a different mating type from the one that dominates in the United States. Scientists are desperately trying to keep the two types apart for fear that they will mate and create an even more virulent form of sudden oak death.

Dave Rizzo, an associate professor of plant pathology at UC Davis, said the latest news shows how important it is to stay focused and keep up the fight. "We've had a couple of years where we haven't had much die-off, probably because of the weather," Rizzo said. "But remember, chestnut blight took 50 years to kill every tree. So we still need to be cautious."

Background: APHIS has established an area of quarantine in CA. Only products that are, or contain, confirmed host species of *P. ramorum* are regulated. See the APHIS list of Frequently Asked Questions for the list of plants regulated. It does include rhodies.

Resources:

1. USDA Pest Alert Fact Sheet: Sudden Oak Death Caused by a New Species, *Phytophthora ramorum*. United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service Region 5, Forest Health Protection NA-PR-06-01 <http://www.fs.fed.us/na/morgantown/fhp/palerts/sod/sod.pdf>.
2. CA Oak Death Mortality task Force Sudden Oak Death home page @ www.suddenoakdeath.org. To distinguish this new disease from diseases with similar appearance, visit www.na.fs.fed.us/SOD.
3. The American Phytopathological Society Article Summary @ <http://www.apsnet.org/pd/search/2002/0115-01r.asp>.
4. APHIS Frequently Asked Questions on SOD: <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ppq/ispm/sod/faq.pdf>

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