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For immediate release

Trees Suffer During Prolonged Drought

Two dry bands of drought straddle the nation. The Climate Prediction Center's U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook predicts that while there will be some improvement in the central part of the country, the drought is likely to persist or intensify well into the summer months. What can homeowners do?

"While it's impossible to keep every tree in good health in times of severe drought, taking a proactive approach for a prized or sentimental tree can support its good health," recommends Robert Rouse, staff arborist for the National Arborist Association. "A plan that is supported with good cultural practices, proactive monitoring for pests and disease, and response to warning signs is more likely to survive," he says.

Silent Suffering: A tree's first damage from drought occurs beneath the soil line in the form of root damage, long before any outward signs of trouble. After a tree's unsuccessful attempts to conserve water by closing stomates, feeder roots die back, sometimes so drastically that the tree is unable to take up enough water to support itself. In the worst case, a healthy looking tree collapses without much warning. More often, though, the signs of stress are much less dramatic.

"Radial growth slows," explains Rouse. "Leaves are undersized and may wilt, yellow, curl, or crinkle, will be marginally scorched, or even turn brown and fall. Emergent shoots are short in an effort to right the imbalance caused by root loss, crown dieback or a general thinning of the canopy occurs."

Opportunistic pests and diseases: That's when "opportunistic" pests make their move. Boring insects are thought to be drawn by the odors and acoustic signals of stressed trees. The sound of water columns breaking cues the borer to invade the tree and lay eggs. Rouse recommends taking preventative action by applying treatment by spray or injection to protect prized or important trees from borers because, "by the time we realize the tree is stressed, it's been heavily riddled and girdled."

Another danger to stressed trees is fungus, which makes initial contact with surface roots. Rouse notes that when a chemical change in the tree signals a weakened state, the fungus penetrates the bark, wood, and cambial zone with fan-like, leathery clumps, cutting off the water supply to the tree.

Watering trees deeply with soaker hoses or irrigation systems – as opposed to brief, surface watering – helps sustain trees. But it's very difficult to do much for a large tree because of the massive amounts of water it needs. With so many trees affected, Rouse recommends watering only those trees that you can help. How much water a home landscape needs depends upon its soil, sun and shade exposure, plant types, irrigation system and local climate. How much water trees require depends upon the type of tree.

Drought exacerbates matters for trees already under stress, such as those on dry slopes, surrounded by pavement, or improperly planted. In landscape situations, consider taking action by perhaps moving smaller trees to a better location, alleviating compaction, or replacing moisture-draining lawn around a tree with a 2- to 3-inch layer of mulch. If you use mulch around the tree, be sure the mulch does not touch the trunk.

Home owners looking for an arborist in their area can contact the National Arborist Association (NAA), a public and professional resource on trees and arboriculture. The NAA has more than 2,800 company-owning members who recognize stringent safety and performance standards, and are required to carry liability insurance. Find a tree care service provider in your area by calling 1-800-733-2622 or by doing a zip code search at the NAA's Web site, www.natlarb.com.

For photos to accompany this press release, contact Mark Garvin at 1-800-733-2622, Ext. 108, or e-mail Garvin@natlarb.com

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Home Owner **TIP** of the Month

Has a drought affected trees in your area?

Here's what you can do to help them:

- ~ Water trees deeply with soaker hoses or an irrigation system.
- ~ Place 2 to 3 inches of mulch around the tree's base. Don't let the mulch touch the tree trunk!
- ~ Contact an NAA arborist to assess the state of your trees and landscape to determine the best action to take to help save your trees.