



Educating youth about Sudden Oak Death

The Issue

Sudden Oak Death is a serious forest disease that has killed more than a million trees and infected many more. It is established in 14 California counties and part of southwestern Oregon, but has the potential to spread further in the coastal forests where it thrives. The disease is caused by a pathogen, *Phytophthora ramorum*, which spreads naturally once established in forests, but can also be spread longer distances via plants and soil that are moved by people. It is therefore vitally important to keep people from inadvertently spreading the pathogen. An education campaign to engage the public on this issue has been in place since 2000, but most outreach has taken place at the professional and adult level; resources for youth were lacking.

What has ANR done?

To address this lack of youth education on Sudden Oak Death, a collaborative effort between the UC Cooperative Extension coordinator for Sudden Oak Death Outreach and the UC Cooperative Extension advisor in Marin County for 4-H youth development created an outreach effort aimed at middle school youth. The resulting program, called "Can My Tree Catch the Flu?" relates the oak pathogen to the more familiar human flu virus to create a better understanding of its effects on trees and its modes of transmission. A series of activities were developed and presented throughout 2009-2010 in a classroom setting to middle school students, at a 4-H day camp to mixed-age youth and as an interactive exhibit to hundreds of youth and their adult chaperones at Marin County Farm Day.

In summer 2011, an intern funded by the Renewable Resources Extension Act took the activities to a new level of interactivity by creating Adobe Flash animations posted on the website of the California Oak Mortality Task Force (www.suddenoakdeath.org). For each of the original four in-person activities, an interactive, animated "scene" was created that allows users to click through different views and answer questions to increase their understanding of Sudden Oak Death.

The Payoff

Activities increase awareness of sanitation and forest disease

Participants greatly increased their knowledge of Sudden Oak Death, from a majority (63%) knowing nothing at the start of the session to 100 percent knowing "some" or "a lot" more about the issue. More importantly, 49 percent said they would clean their shoes to prevent the spread of forest pathogens. This increased knowledge and participation in sanitation actions will help reduce the long-distance, artificial spread of the Sudden Oak Death pathogen. By bringing these activities to wider audiences through exhibits and online games, we are able to encourage even more people to help keep the pathogen from spreading, in ongoing efforts to keep forests free from this damaging disease.

Contact

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