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Dead trees along Highway 24 removed to promote safety

By Sora O'Doherty



Recent tree mitigation work being done by Caltrans on Highway 24 near St. Stephens Drive, on El Miso Ranch Road. Photo courtesy MOFD Beginning in late December, Caltrans maintenance personnel have been removing potentially hazardous trees beside state route 24 between First Street in Lafayette and the Orinda exit. The trees were primarily dead and dying Monterey pines.

"The project is much more complex than simply falling trees in a forest. Crews must use a large crane to remove the trees one piece at a time to keep roads open and the public and employees safe," said Caltrans Bay Area's Deputy of Maintenance Parviz Lashai. The project goal is to remove more than 100 dead trees along the highway at a cost of just over \$150,000.

According to Marcus Wagner, Caltrans public information officer, the increase in tree mortality is most likely due to stress brought about by several years of severe drought and invasive pests such as bark beetles. Dead or dying "red-needle" trees are of concern as the needles can become flying embers and help create the conditions for

rapid wildfire spread. In their weakened condition, these trees could also possibly fall and obstruct portions of the roadway.

Wagner told Lamorinda Weekly that approximately 40 dead trees were targeted for removal with 20 trees removed so far. Caltrans' contractor estimates another 10 days of work. To prevent problems with erosion, crews are removing the trees, but leaving the roots in place. The work covers about a two-mile stretch of Highway 24, from mile marker 3.00 to 5, in and around the cities of Orinda and Lafayette.

Both the Moraga-Orinda Fire District and the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District applauded the work being completed prior to the summer fire season. MOFD Fire Marshal Jeff Isaacs said, "Wildfire prevention needs to be a year-round project to keep our communities safe." Residents are encouraged to check their property for dead or dying trees and take advantage of the winter and spring months to remove them well before wildfire prevention inspections begin on June 1.

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