

Sudden Oak Death in California Fueled Wildfires

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Sudden oak death may have fueled the California wildfires that have left a path of destruction in its wake, a UC Berkeley forest ecologist said Thursday, [according to SFGate](#).

This past year has seen a dramatic uptick in the number of oaks, manzanita and native plants that have been infected by sudden oak death, a tree-killing disease that can wreak havoc on forest areas.

Matteo Garbelotto, the director of the UC Berkeley Forest Pathology and Mycology Laboratory, explaining that dead oak caused hotter wildfires and that spread faster.

This information is based on a study released Friday that conducted an analysis on trees sampled in eastern Sonoma County, prior to the fires.

What Garbelotto's team found was that 37 percent of these trees were infected by sudden oak death, a dramatic increase over the past two years and the worst outbreak Garbelotto has seen since the testing program began in 2007.

The cause of the fires has not been conclusively determined and Garbelotto cannot determine how much the incidence of sudden oak death contributed to the devastation, but the ecologist has seen a notable pattern.

"Certainly when I look at the map I see a very obvious overlap with the incidence of sudden oak death and where the fires were," Garbelotto said, according to SFGate. "California is more susceptible to larger and hotter fires, specifically because of the large number of dying oaks, which are basically match sticks."

Garbelotto is not the first to suggest the link between devastating wildfires and the occurrence of sudden oak death in California.

[California Oak Mortality Task Force released a study](#) in 2009 that looked at the impact of sudden oak death on wildland fire behavior and the conclusions were similar, suggesting that the disease may "cause increases in fire behavior, at least in localized areas, that make changes in firefighting tactics necessary."

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