Twenty-two pair of stingless wasps released at UCSD to combat Eucalyptus tree pests

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STINGLESS WASPS RELEASED AT UCSD TO COMBAT EUCALYPTUS TREE PESTS

Twenty-two pair of stingless wasps, a known natural enemy of a rust brown and yellow beetle that is killing California's Eucalyptus trees, are being released from 3:30 P.M-4:30 P.M. today on the campus of the University of California, San Diego.

The wasps were imported from Australia by UC Riverside entomologists to suppress the beetle, known as the Eucalyptus longhorned borer, without harming humans or other insects.

The beetle has become a serious problem in California since it emigrated here from Australia without any natural enemies.

First discovered infesting Eucalyptus trees near El Toro in October 1984, the longhorned borer has since spread throughout the state, along the coast from the San Francisco Bay area to San Diego, and inland from Van Nuys to Imperial Valley.

Phil Peters, supervisor of UCSD's tree crew, said more than 270 Eucalyptus trees were killed last year by the borer. Between 150,000 to 200,000 Eucalyptus trees are growing on the UCSD campus in La Jolla.

"We have a serious problem," said Peters. "That's why we were picked for this release."

The transport of firewood has contributed to the beetle's rapid spread throughout the California. In addition, the state's five-year drought has provided the beetles with perfect conditions, since trees are particularly vulnerable when they suffer from moisture stress.

To attack the pests, UCR scientists Jocelyn Millar and Timothy Paine imported some of their natural enemies from home, more formally known as Syngaster lepidus Brulle. In addition to the Syngaster, the scientists have recruited one or two additional stingless wasps for their arsenal. Future releases at other locations throughout San Diego and the state are expected during the year.

The UCR scientists added that the wasps are difficult and costly to rear and are not available for general release to the public at this time.

"We will continue to lose Eucalyptus trees that are already weak or dying, but our aggressive, multidisciplinary approach should knock the beetle population down to acceptable levels and prevent them from attacking healthier trees," said Robert Luck, a UCR scientist specializing in biological control.

Peters added it would take at least one year before the program to have an impact on the UCSD campus.

MEDIA NOTE: Only close-up shots, either video or photographic, will be permitted at the release site. A copy of a UCSD campus map shows the approximately location of the site.

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