



Severe Oak Moth Infestation in Belmont

We are receiving a high volume of calls from concerned residents reporting that the California Oak Moth have decimated their oak trees. At this time, we estimate that there are thousands of oak trees that are infested in Belmont. The caterpillars feed on the leaves leaving the tree bare. It is not usually fatal but severe or repeated infestations could be fatal to the trees. We expect the cycle to end in the next several weeks and hope it does not return in the spring time. We have not seen an outbreak like this in probably 12 to 15 years and that one was not as severe and widespread as this year. Most of the trees infested during that outbreak recovered.

Here is some additional information on the California Oak Moth. Please share the information or you may refer the residents to the Parks and Recreation Department at 595-7441.

The California oak moth (*Phryganidia californica*) is a native insect of coastal California. The caterpillars feed upon the leaves of our native Coast Live Oak and also some deciduous trees. During these outbreaks caterpillars are often seen suspended from silk strands, dropping to the ground, and congregating on fence posts, mail boxes, and other available platforms. In the most extreme years, the infestation may lead to severe oak defoliation. The tan brown adult moths are seen in the late afternoons as they hover around infested trees with the goal of mating and laying eggs for the next generation of caterpillars. Larger outbreaks occur approximately every 8-10 years.

Healthy oaks usually recover from these defoliation events. Age, condition of trees, as well as human caused impacts are also factors in how well oaks recover. Oaks that are simultaneously subjected to stresses caused by landscape or home construction, drought, soil compaction, or fungal infections(*i.e.* Sudden Oak Death Syndrome or oak root fungus) may be more seriously impacted.

The Parks and Recreation Department has been monitoring the situation but is not proposing action at this time. In addition, this is a natural process that, although destructive, is part of the natural heritage of living in a wooded community.

Residents concerned about a particular oak may wish to engage a certified arborist to evaluate the impact of the moths on an individual tree. Most trees will survive, but some may need additional help to make it through.