

## Importing Logs: A Risky Business

Are we prepared to gamble with our future? The importation of unprocessed softwood logs from temperate regions of the world to the western United States is a gamble. Many Pacific Northwest lumber mills anticipate serious log supply shortages in the near future and view the importation of foreign logs that could be processed in Northwest mills as a way out of a difficult predicament. Countries from Russia to New Zealand to Chile appear very willing to profit by establishment of a lucrative log trade with American concerns. However, American forests could suffer considerable losses if pathogens and pests that accompany imported logs are not given proper consideration.

While we do not oppose free trade and we admit that efforts to locate new sources of raw materials may be worthwhile endeavors, we feel strongly that there is great need for caution where importation of unprocessed logs is concerned. There is ample historical evidence that destructive, exotic tree pathogens can be transported on or in logs that are shipped intercontinentally. Once established, these pathogens tend to be especially difficult, if not impossible, to eradicate or control. One has only to consider chestnut blight, Dutch elm disease, white pine blister rust, beech bark disease, larch canker, and Port-Orford cedar root disease to appreciate the staggering economic losses and ecological impacts of introduced tree diseases. Many past introductions are believed to have originated from shipments of nursery stock or logs colonized by pathogens. Logs pose special problems because pathogens that occur inside them are well protected and thus particularly difficult to detect or to treat.

A member of the APS Forest Pathology Committee recently participated in a joint USDA Forest Service/Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service risk assessment of potential pests on larch logs proposed for importation from Siberia and the Russian Far East to the western United States (see USDA Forest Service Miscellaneous Publication No. 1495, September 1991: "Pest Risk Assessment of the Importation of Larch from Siberia and the Soviet Far East"). The assessment team based its analyses on a search of the existing literature, consultation with Russian and American specialists, and on-site visits to log source and shipping areas in the Far East. The analyses strongly suggested that larch

pathogens native to the Far East but not the western United States could be transported on or in logs, survive transit, become established near ports of entry, and subsequently spread with potentially severe adverse impacts. There was also concern expressed about possible genetic differences between Russian and American pathogen populations reported to occur in both regions. Furthermore, although accurate predictions are difficult, some organisms considered to be innocuous in Russia might have the potential to become serious pests when introduced into new areas with different environmental conditions or more susceptible hosts. Such organisms, as well as many yet unknown forest pathogens, may exist in the Russian Far East and Siberia. The assessment team reached the inescapable conclusion that the pest introduction risk associated with importing unprocessed Russian logs is substantial.

The forest resource in western North America is vast and valuable. The western United States has 14,623,000 acres of commercial forestland that is reckoned to contain 1,167,502,800,000 board feet of softwood lumber. The forest resource in the west also has incalculable aesthetic, recreational, wildlife habitat, and watershed values. Introduced tree diseases could seriously threaten substantial portions of this resource. Nursery stock, ornamental trees, and Christmas tree plantations could also be at risk. We believe that the potential losses that could be caused by introduced tree pathogens/pests are so great that every effort should be made to avoid their establishment. Proven, effective mitigation treatments that can eliminate pathogens completely to the centers of logs should be an integral part of all log importation procedures. No shortcuts should be allowed. We urge members of the American Phytopathological Society to keep abreast of the log importation issue, make their feelings on the issue known, and do all that they can to ensure that pest introduction considerations are properly addressed in any regulatory decisions that are ultimately made.

*Written on behalf of and in conjunction with the APS Forest Pathology Committee by:*

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