



## **Q&A: Tree of Concern at Spreckels Center to be Removed**

After a recent assessment of public risk, the City has decided to remove a tree of concern at the site of the John D. Spreckels Center construction. The decision was made after careful review and consideration of public safety concerns. City staff recommend its removal under the City's policy for the removal of hazardous trees.

**Question:** Where is the tree in relation to the John D. Spreckels Center construction?

**Answer:** It is the Blue Gum eucalyptus tree closest to construction activity. It is adjacent to Seventh Street, near the corner of Orange Avenue.

**Question:** What steps were taken to protect the tree?

**Answer:** The tree was identified as one of the trees in Spreckels Park west that could be preserved and could coexist near the construction site of the new Spreckels Center. In accordance with the project specifications, all trees to remain, including this eucalyptus tree, were cordoned off with construction fencing to ensure equipment operations and other activities, including digging, were not occurring within the trees' drip lines.

**Question:** Who recommended the tree be removed and what are the qualifications required to make that decision?

**Answer:** Gene Bordson, an arborist with West Coast Arborists, reported in an October 28 assessment that the tree presents an overall high risk of failure. The assessment also found that the consequences of such a failure, due to its maturity and size, could be severe to a person and significant to a vehicle or building. The arborist recommended that the City consider removing the tree as it appears to be in a state of decline and unlikely to recover.

**Question:** When did the City find out the tree was dying?

**Answer:** The eucalyptus began displaying a "dieback" of branches just 4-6 weeks ago. This "die back," or rapid decline, is typical of trees of significant size and maturity. When the condition was observed, it was immediately reported to the City and an arborist inspection was ordered.

**Question:** What construction activities contributed to the tree's decline and could they have been avoided?

**Answer:** Several factors contributed to the tree's decline.

(1) The tree was located in a position where only half of its root area, under the tree's drip line, could receive natural and irrigation water. The other half of the tree's roots were under paved areas. This area was compacted soil and caused this large tree to have roots near the surface and disproportionately to one side.

(2) This tree was evaluated to be structurally deficient prior to the start of construction activities. It is in the last quarter of its life, estimated at 75 to 100 years in an urban setting.

(3) This was the closest tree, not removed, to the new building boundary. Because of the compact site, underground utilities were confined to areas adjacent to the building to prevent damaging other trees in the park.

(4) The building design required an over-excavation of four feet to provide a stable base for the building structure. This excavation undoubtedly affected roots from the Blue Gum.

(5) The building's design required all of the first season's rainwater be removed and captured in dry wells, which then would percolate the water back into the soil. Again, because of a confined site and the tree's close proximity to the building, these storm water structures were located within the Blue Gum's root field.

**Question:** What were the governing regulations that required storm drain excavation on the site?

**Answer:** National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES).

**Question:** Were there reasonable alternatives to the methods employed by the contractor that would have prevented damaging the Gum's root system?

**Answer:** All measures were taken to locate underground utilities in areas that did not adversely impact tree root systems. However, site constraints and regulatory requirements did impact tree roots.

**Question:** What is the replacement tree plan?

**Answer:** The location of this tree is on public property, directly adjacent to a City right of way. While not technically a Street Tree, the City's Street Tree Committee will be asked to provide a recommended replacement species. Once the Spreckels Center construction project is complete and the new landscaping has a chance to establish in the spring of 2017, the Street Tree Committee will select a tree from the City's Approved Street Tree list that best matches the size at maturity and shade characteristics of the tree to be removed. The tree selected will be purchased and planted at a location near where the Blue Gum is today.

**Question:** What is the condition of the remaining significant trees and shrubs?

**Answer:** All remaining trees and shrubs are currently in acceptable and healthy condition. One tree has some indications of stress. It will be carefully pruned and monitored by the City's arborist over the next twelve months.