

For Immediate Release

S.O.D. ONE ACRONYM WE MUST LIVE WITHOUT

An open letter to turfgrass associations, turfgrass producers, representatives of the Green Trade and anyone who is involved in any aspect of the turfgrass and/or landscape industries.

ROLLING MEADOWS, IL – DECEMBER, 2004

“SOD is the SARS of the Plant World.”

“Suspect cases of SOD need to be confirmed by a diagnostic system so that the whereabouts of *P. ramorum* can be determined for possible management and or eradication.”

“Strict measures need to be implemented to ensure SOD does not become established in Michigan, or if it is already established (which I suspect is the case) to contain its spread as much as possible.”

The “Law of Unintended Consequences” reared its head in this manner in the June 2004 issue of *The Landsculptor* when the *Leaflets News and Information* section featured an article written by Dr. David L. Roberts, Extension Specialist and District Horticulture Agent, Michigan State titled, “*Sudden Oak Death – A Disease We Don’t Want*”. Within that article the acronym **SOD** was used as an abbreviation for Sudden Oak Death. The consequences of that acronym become apparent as you read the excerpts (above) that appeared within the article.

In fairness to Dr. Roberts, it should be noted that he did not create the acronym **SOD** for Sudden Oak Death. Actually, the acronym has been in use and is still being used by an alarming number of sources from within the United States Department of Agriculture on down to county and state agencies, special task forces, university researchers, extension agents and yes, even nurseries.

For example:

The following quotes came from a University of Illinois Extension Educator

“The causal fungus of SOD is *Phytophthora ramorum*.”

“SOD causes rapid decline of oaks, usually resulting in death in one to three years.”

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These quotes appear on various county extension and/or Department of Agriculture websites:

“The presence of these fungi generally indicates an advanced stage of the disease, though they are present on many other trees that are not suffering from SOD.”

“It should therefore not be assumed that all dying oaks have SOD. The impact of SOD must be considered in the context of all of the factors affecting tree health.”

“The U.S. Department of Agriculture has adopted an interim federal quarantine to prevent the artificial (i.e., human-assisted) spread of SOD to other parts of the U.S.”

The Oregon Department of Agriculture also has a quarantine in place for SOD to prevent further artificial spread of SOD within Oregon.

“The California Department of Food & Agriculture has similar regulations. Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the European Union and South Korea have also adopted quarantines to protect their horticultural and natural resources from SOD.”

“Defenders of Wildlife published the SOD article “Mighty Oaks in Trouble” in the summer edition of their magazine “Defenders”. The article discusses the potential invasive species aspect of SOD, highly impacted areas and the impact SOD has had on the ecology of those areas, and the role of education and regulations in slowing disease spread.”

Unfortunately, the use of **SOD** as an acronym for Sudden Oak Death may have an unintentional yet detrimental impact on turfgrass sod producers. In reading the above excerpts from numerous sources one can easily see how well intentioned information could be misinterpreted when taken out of context.

Craig Regelbrugge, senior director of government relations with the *American Nursery & Landscape Association*, speculated that the name was first coined by some seeking wide publicity and research funding support. Regelbrugge stated, "The name Sudden Oak Death sensationalizes the issue, and scares and misleads the public. *Phytophthora ramorum* is neither sudden, nor does it always result in tree or plant death."

We would encourage everyone in the green trade press, as well as scientists, extension agents and government officials, to give serious consideration to the discontinuation of the acronym **SOD** (with or without periods) in reporting or identifying Sudden Oak Death. *Phytophthora ramorum* is the proper scientific genus and species name. *P. ramorum* or *Ramorum leaf blight and dieback* are other names that can also be used.

While we recognize and share everyone’s concern regarding the severe loss in oak trees and other wooded plants that have resulted from this terrible disease, we feel a responsibility to make sure there is no unintentional connection perceived on the part of the general public, or within the green industry, between this disease and the quality products grown by turfgrass sod producers.

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The challenge before us is to work together to build awareness and heightened the sensitivity on the part of those government agencies, local organizations, university researchers, educators and extension agents who refer to Sudden Oak Death as **SOD**. We must ask everyone in the media to be especially sensitive on how information is conveyed to the general public.

Because this acronym is so prevalent, it will take the collective efforts of all of us to eliminate its common use. In the event you should see the acronym **SOD** (Sudden Oak Death) used to describe *Phytophthora ramorum* in a magazine, newspaper article, research paper, on a website, or on signs outside a nursery, we would encourage you to let the source know of your concern.

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