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Ambos on dieback alert

St John Ambulance, State Emergency Service and Goldfields Surf Life Saving Club volunteers are on alert for Phytophthora dieback following a recent workshop with South Coast NRM's Project Dieback team.

Team members Robyn Cail and Tim Brett emphasised the importance of dieback hygiene in the field, especially as emergency vehicles often carry out operations in bushland, along coastlines, and in inaccessible areas where dieback infections have not been established.

Mr Brett said these disease free areas were highly valued and it was important for field workers to realise that they must take precautions in order to avoid spreading the pathogen.

"Once introduced, dieback will eat away at the vegetation, just as plaque does to your teeth. Unfortunately we can't clean the bush like we can our teeth.

"As dieback is a soil-borne disease that relies on moist conditions for reproduction, we're urging anyone out in the field to avoid muddy or waterlogged areas.

"This will stop infected soil being taken into other areas of bush where it will feed on the roots of plants and then spread slowly from root to root contact or downslope in soil water," he said.

Field workers could also run the risk of taking dieback home and unwittingly introducing it to their gardens or farms, Mr Brett explained.

Once in the garden, Phytophthora dieback affects many plants and can be spread as easily as digging holes across the property or shifting plants from one garden bed to another.

"Dieback is known to severely affect many avocado, citrus fruit and nut trees so it's important to start clean and stay clean," he said.

Volunteers that attended the workshop now understand how dieback works and what measures they should take to reduce its chances of introduction and spread into the bush, and at home.

ENDS

PHOTO: St John Ambulance Volunteers L-R Julie Starcevich, Viv Bowkett and Tony Leeson.

Jenelle Carter
Communications and Public Relations Coordinator
South Coast NRM
Direct (08) 9845 8521
Mobile 0428 928 536
Email jenellec@southcoastnrm.com.au