Pest Management Program staff have fielded some concerns from forest practice inspectors in the past related to pine slash treatment in the northern coast ranges (in some cases, RPFs and LTOs who specifically did not intend to follow the BMPs set forth in Tech Rule Addendum No. 3 for hazard reduction through treatment of brood material)--but one large-scale source of green slash that shouldn't be overlooked is material cleared for utility line ROWs. The largest-scale one recently is on Mt Diablo. A large amount of slash was generated for power line clearance in the SW part of the park in 2018. In the past two years, there has been a few extreme heat events on top of drought, and the knobcone pine stands immediately adjacent to the ROW went brown starting in fall 2020 from attack by California 5-spined Ips beetles. These stands are still dying now. It is possible that this contributed to a wider Bay Area-wide population increase in CA 5-spined Ips that in turn contributed to fairly large acreages of Monterey pines dying around San Pablo and Briones Reservoirs. A private consultant is just finishing a report on the Mt Diablo outbreak that points to the slash creation as the beginning of the whole outbreak and mortality episode.

It is very common for Pest Specialists to see bark beetle attacks on living trees after green slash is piled nearby; and it does not just happen with pines. The weak bark beetles that infest cypresses and redwoods use small-diameter material as a breeding ground, and if they are near small green trees that are competing with heavy brush in droughty conditions, they can overcome those trees too. Right along the coast, this hazard for all sorts of coastal conifers can be worse than in the interior, because the conditions are good for beetle activity year-round.

It is easy to see how outbreaks like the one on Mt Diablo can lead to increased fire risk and treefall hazards, and what goes for utility line clearing goes for slash created incidental to any other tree-cutting activity too.

CAL FIRE Pest Specialists have run into situations where fuel breaks were being built in a mixed oak and pine area. Oak slash was piled against remaining standing oak trees. The western oak bark beetle was attracted to the slash and then spilled out to the standing trees, attacking them, and introducing foamy bark canker.  Most of the larger trees fought off the joint attack but many smaller trees died.  Slash is an ongoing issue for many species.

In San Luis Obispo County, a thinning was being conducted in Cambria in an oak/pine forest where pine slash was left on the ground. The unit forester was concerned about this being brood material for beetles to build up in and he contacted the Pest Specialist who agreed and was also concerned. Proactively they are now chipping the slash a day or two after being removed from the tree. This is a good example of being aware of the potential problem and treating the slash appropriately.  Slash is and will be an ongoing issue for many species which should be considered.

The green slash left from utility right-of-way clearing (i.e., cutting and leaving trees or trimming tree limbs) creates brood material for insects that can spread into the residual adjacent stand of trees creating an additional fire hazard. This is especially critical in areas already suffering from drought impacts.