

Billions of dead trees force fire crews to shift tactics

By Associated Press

Vast stands of dead timber in the Western U.S. have forced firefighters to shift tactics, trying to stay out of the shadow of lifeless, unstable trees that could come crashing down with deadly force.

About 6.3 billion dead trees are still standing in 11 Western states, up from 5.8 billion five years ago, according to U.S. Forest Service statistics compiled for the *Associated Press*.

Since 2010, a massive infestation of beetles has been the leading cause of tree mortality in the West and now accounts for about 20 percent of the standing dead trees, the Forest Service says. The rest were killed by drought, disease, fire or other causes.

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