

Submission to the Ann Arbor News “Your World” column for 9-26-05:

Emerald ash borer problem has grown

In light of the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina, issues like invasive species recede from the spotlight. But as thin budgets are stretched even further, it may be worth our while to keep an eye on problems which can increase exponentially. For instance, the federal government estimates that the eradication of ash trees from North America could equal up to \$60 billion in losses.

A lot has changed in the last year in terms of the Emerald ash borer (EAB) problem:

- New quarantine regulations have expanded to include all hardwood (non-coniferous) species, not just ash. This is because it is virtually impossible to inspect a load of wood and pick out only the ash logs. And all hardwood logs are prohibited from entering the Upper Peninsula, even those from NON-quarantined areas. In other words: don't move firewood!
- The EAB has reached the Upper Peninsula—it was recently discovered in a campground on Lake Superior. This is despite a firewood checkpoint program that was instituted last May at the Mackinac Bridge in an effort to keep the bug from entering.
- The use of trap trees that lure nearby beetles has improved the ability to locate new populations. In addition to the 20 quarantined counties, 19 more “outliers” have been identified. The known infestations are currently spread all around the Lower Peninsula.
- The federal government has called for individuals to collect ash seeds, which will be preserved at a gene banking center in Colorado, in the event that the species is wiped out. See www.mi.nrcs.usda.gov.
- The fines for breaking quarantine regulations have been increased from \$100 to a minimum of \$1,000. And bringing EAB to a national forest is punishable by a minimum \$5,000 fine.
- A new wood-boring beetle from China (related to the devastating Asian longhorned beetle) was introduced to the U.S. last winter: a Michigan woman discovered the bugs in a boxed set of three ornamental Christmas trees--made from real wood--that she had purchased at Ace Hardware. But by then the trees had been marketed by several retailers across the country. Unsold sets were recalled, but those already sold were not tracked down. The trees had been certified as heat-treated, according to law, but heat treatment isn't always effective.
- The U.S. was granted an exemption from the Montreal Protocol to use methyl bromide to fumigate wood shipping crates (the most common vehicle on which invasive wood boring beetles hitch a ride into our country). Although methyl bromide more effectively kills bugs than does heat treatment, it is also a destructive ozone-depleter which was originally scheduled to be phased out by 2005. To eliminate treating crates altogether, some advocate a move away from the one-way, disposable wood crate system to a two-way system using durable plastic or metal containers instead.

While the EAB problem is complex with no easy answers, one thing is worth remembering: fall is tree-planting season!

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