

Little bug, big worries in Cranberry

State acting quickly to squash any threat from emerald ash borer

Thursday, June 28, 2007

By Dan Majors, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

State officials yesterday banned the transportation of ash trees and firewood into or out of Allegheny, Butler, Beaver and Lawrence counties after an emerald ash borer -- a tiny green beetle from Asia -- was discovered in a tree in Cranberry.

The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture ordered the quarantine in an attempt to protect the state's ash trees, which are commonly used in roadside landscaping because of their ability to tolerate road salt. The wood, which is pliant yet tough, is used to make baseball bats.



An adult emerald ash borer. The bug's actual size is about that of a penny.

[Click photo for larger image.](#)

The discovery of the emerald ash borer in a young ash tree along Route 19 near the Interstate 79/Pennsylvania Turnpike Connector is alarming, officials said, because the wood-boring beetles have been responsible for the destruction of more than 20 million ash trees in Michigan, Ohio and Indiana since they were first reported near Detroit in the July 2002.

In response to the discovery, swarms of inspectors from the state Forestry Service and the state and U.S. agriculture departments will descend upon Cranberry today for a two-day survey, examining ash trees within a mile radius of the infested tree.

"To best manage any effects of an infestation, we're working to determine whether this is an isolated incident or a more widespread problem," state Agriculture Secretary Dennis Wolff said in a news release.

Cranberry manager Jerry Andree said residents and business owners in the area can expect inspectors to knock on their doors to request permission to examine ash trees on their property. The inspectors also will hand out pamphlets informing homeowners of what to look for in their ash trees to make sure they are not infested.

"Things are evolving quickly," Mr. Andree said. "They already had a team of people here gathering maps [yesterday], and more inspectors are coming in. It's going to be a very methodical search and we're working to get the word out to our folks. They're taking this very seriously."

According to state officials, the emerald ash borer is native to China and eastern Asia. It likely arrived in North America hidden in wood packing materials commonly used to ship consumer and other goods.



Associated Press

An infected emerald ash borer branch from Algonac, Mich.

[Click photo for larger image.](#)

The adult beetles, which grow to be only about a half-inch long, nibble on ash foliage but do little damage. Their larvae cause the real destruction, feeding on the tree's inner bark, disrupting its ability to transport water and nutrients. Most infested trees die within three years.

Visible damage includes dying tree crowns, loose bark and woodpecker holes on all varieties of ash trees except the mountain ash, which is not a true ash tree. The flight stage of the beetle's life cycle, during which infestations are spread, runs from May to September.

When they emerge as adults, the beetles leave D-shaped holes in the bark about one-eighth inch wide.

"We're all learning. We never heard of this beetle before," said Mr. Andree. "We're like, 'Wow, where did this come from?' You always hear about these things happening across the country, but you never think it will happen in your own back yard."

The quarantine restricts the movement of ash nursery stock, green lumber and any other ash material, including logs, stumps, roots and branches, and all wood chips.

Because of the difficulty in distinguishing between species of firewood, campers are being asked to use only locally harvested firewood, which should all be burned on-site and not carried to new locations. All types of hardwood firewood, including ash, oak, maple and hickory, are considered quarantined.

Visitors to the Allegheny National Forest have been asked not to bring their own firewood.

People who suspect they have seen the emerald ash borer should call the state Agriculture Department's toll-free pest hot line at 1-866-253-7189.

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