Resident Focus: The Dilemma of the Emerald Ash Borer

Whether you walked, biked, or drove around our village this past summer you might have noticed a dramatic decline in the number of dead or dying ash trees around town. The village is suffering from a continued and aggressive infestation of the Emerald Ash borer. This is not a new topic, nor is it a partisan one; but the Emerald Ash borer has the potential to be come one of the most serious environmental threats to our tree population in recent generations. This insect has ravaged the acreage of forested lands throughout the Upper Midwest region. Officials most recently at Wisconsin's Devil's Lake State Park have been ravaged by the Emerald Ash borer to such a point, that they are now resorting to using pesticide as a control mechanism for this pest's destructive appetite.

Many local communities have pest management plans on the books to control the EAB outbreak, including diseased tree ordinances and resolutions for the strict management of EAB. Residents, including Board Members, have personally experienced the devastating affects caused by the Emerald Ash borer through the loss of many ash trees on their property. It is important that we remain alert to the physical and aesthetic damage this insect has caused already and remain committed in our approach to mitigate the problem.

For those unfamiliar with the Emerald Ash borer, it enters the bark of trees and destroys them from the inside out causing notable signs of damage: D-shaped exit holes in the bark, excessive woodpecker activity is noted. Canopy dieback is a classic sign that your tree has the disease. For a symptom checklist the University of Illinois/extension website offers information on ash tree identification and a symptom checklist). There is even an option where you may email a digital photo w/contact information on your specific tree problem to: AGR.EAB@illinois.gov for a more detailed analysis.

There are two possible options available to you to stem the tide of the active infestation on your trees. The first is, that you may treat a partially infected tree of 20-30% of the total once in the fall and again in spring. The IDA publishes a list that homeowners can consult regarding varied insecticidal approaches to manage the problem; including a two page insecticidal plan to answer questions and concerns that individuals might have about EAB. Please note that I am not endorsing any particular type or brand, it is merely meant to be informational.

With respect to the safety of insecticides, and to those who are concerned about the environmental impact, I offer the following information. (www.emeraldashborer.com) Ash trees are wind-pollinated, and are not a nectar source to bees, therefore it will not impact the bee population. Second, systemic insecticides are that are soil-based are safe to use and will not impact ground water or surface water quality. They degrade quickly in sunlight and aquatic threats are non-existent. Furthermore, trunk injectable insecticides will not injure or wound mature trees and furthermore, trees treated with chemicals will not develop a resistance to the EAB product over time.

For extremely diseased or dead trees beyond treatment, I ask that you urgently consider removing any dead trees and their residual branches along with the stump removed and hauled away. Research is beginning to suggest that the Emerald Ash borer does not discriminate on Ash trees alone making it a more complex and contentious problem. Experts strongly recommend that you hire a certified landscape company to do the work, as diseased trees such as the ash require special handling. The IDA provides a list of companies who are compliant vendors. You may also burn the material, at the original site. Do not move it elsewhere. You can burn the stump and branches, and abide as always with the village's burning ordinance with appropriate safety precautions and oversight in mind. Ideally, it is best to pulverize the stump up to 8" down and grind the debris into less than 1" pieces with the rental of a stump grinder. It is important to ensure the larvae is destroyed. Experts in the field agree that this is one of the safest proven control methods to contain the spread. Many homeowners are recognizing that these steps must be taken and are doing so accordingly.

Please note, that If homeowners choose to do nothing, it is very likely that the active larvae of the beetle that resides within the trunk and stump of a deceased or ailing tree will invariably spread over time; which means healthy trees on your property as well as those of your neighbor's lot will continue to be at risk!

In the cold weather seasons, extreme care shoulde be exercised on how and where to store fire- wood as it will remain the insect's primary food source. One of the most important elements of containing the EAB outbreak is to purchase firewood locally and from approved vendors and EAB compliant firewood distributors. The Emerald Ash borer insect lives within firewood, so do not to transport firewood across state lines or pack it for your next campsite outing. By adhering to these IDA guidelines, you limit and safeguard the spread of this pest's vast regional impact throughout our state and our immediate region.

If you have any comments or questions you may reach me directly at lhcools@barringtonhills.il.gov. The only way to slow the beetle's march on our trees is to support an ongoing educational campaign on EAB that stresses individual responsibility and management of the problem at the residential level. EAB is a silent threat to the delicate ecological and environmental balance of our unique village. Remember, It takes decades to replace just one tree! Let's join together as a community now to save these beautiful trees, and ensure that they will be around and healthy for future generations to enjoy!

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