

EMERALD ASH BORER IN SOUTHWEST OHIO

Not all ash trees are infested! The world is not coming to an end either! As of this issue there are no known instances of this borer in Hamilton or Clermont County. There is, however, quarantine in effect for Warren County just to our north.

We do not need to start removing all our ash trees. It may be necessary to deal with them eventually but there is no need to panic. It is a good idea to have a plan in case what may be inevitable does occur so that the costs involved do not put a strain on your budget. We can for the time being, live with our ash trees, enjoy their shade, fall colors, and hope that ongoing research can find a solution to this problem.

First, a little history to help us better understand the insect. The Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) was identified in Michigan in 2002, but studies are now showing it may have been in the country for up to 20 years given its movement and the locations it now resides. It is a native insect in Asia and is found in climates such as the northern U.S. One of the main reasons it took this long to diagnose was that the damage resembles typical problems associated with ash trees. It probably arrived in this continent via crate or packing material through the ports in Detroit, Michigan. The movement through Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, and Canada is the result of the transportation of trees, lumber, and firewood. It has been noted that more recent outbreaks are somewhat in the vicinity of interstate and state highways.

The adult borers only fly about a half mile, a factor in determining that other methods were used in distributing this insect. Adults are about ½” long and 1/8” wide and are a metallic green – bronzy color. They emerge from distinct D-shaped, 1/8” wide exit holes May to August, where they live about 2 weeks to mate and feed. Females will lay eggs which when they hatch the larvae tunnel underneath the bark and begin to feed on the living tissues of the ash tree. The borers are whitish color with bell shaped segments along their entire length, looking like tapeworms. The tunnels are serpentine shaped and are filled with frass; digested sawdust. Native borers push this frass from the tunnels to the outside of the tree, EAB does not.

EAB affects all ash trees and only ash (*Fraxinus*) trees, not Sorbus, the Mountain Ash which is not a true ash. Fertilizing to increase the vigor of your ash tree will not help. They attack ash trees in all stages of health or decline, unlike some of our native insects which only attack stressed trees.

An ash tree that has been in decline or has been dying from the top down is one of the indications it may be infected, but ashes in general show this symptom from normal native problems. The distinct D-shaped exit holes in the bark are the first sign to look for. Dissecting a dead branch and finding serpentine or winding frass-filled tunnels under the bark is another. If there is an increase in woodpecker activity and your tree looks like it may have been shot with a shotgun, that’s another possible sign for EAB. Vertical bark splitting is yet another indication of infestation associated with this insect. An increase in

the number of live sprouts growing from the trunk below deadwood is also an indicator of EAB.

Until recently, any finds of infestations were dealt with by establishing quarantine and removing all ash trees within a half mile of the infested tree(s). Unfortunately the federal and state funds for such extensive work are not available anymore. Now when EAB is found the county is placed under quarantine. No ash trees or wood of other hardwoods is allowed to be transported out of the county, unless it is coniferous in nature (spruce, pines, etc.). That includes logs, firewood, mulch, and wood chips. It is recommended that infected ashes be ground up and burned to prevent its spread. There are fines associated with not following the regulations.

The Ohio Department of Agriculture, the Ohio State Extension Service, and the Ohio Department of Forestry have been working together to help others locate this pest, and educate the public on what they can do to prevent this from getting out of control in our state as well as neighboring states. The following are a few more points of interest which some may help you develop a plan or a conclusion to suit your needs.

* Individual property owners are responsible for their own ash trees. Dead or dying ashes can pose obvious hazards and need to be dealt with as would any other trees.

* At the present time there are 10,000 “indicator trees” around the state being collected and dissected. Sometime this winter these purposely injured trees will be studied and it will be determined if there are any other portions of the state that need to be quarantined.

* Treatment with insecticides can only be a preventative measure. Studies have shown that efficacy levels have varied greatly and none are 100% effective.

* It is recommended that if an existing ash tree is already in need of pruning work that one would consider going ahead with its removal at this time. As for healthy trees there is no need to remove them now. Enjoy them and hope that research will result in finding a solution.

* It would be a good idea to start planting other species to take the place of the ashes and to diversify your landscape. Plant a mix of trees to help eliminate any possible monoculture situation where you could lose all your trees if they are of just one specie. We have witnessed that with Dutch elm disease and chestnut blight in the past. Planting now will give the new trees a chance to establish themselves in the meantime if there is ever a need to remove the ashes.

* Come up with a budget and start saving so that if an infestation does occur and you have to deal with it, the costs won't be such a burden. If in the future it turns out that you do not have to deal with the problem, you will have funds to do with as you please.

* It would be reasonable that ash trees in wooded areas be left alone. If an infestation does occur, such as a wide spread invasion in the future, leaving them to do what all dead

trees do naturally would be logical. There is wildlife that does take advantage of such a dilemma, for example woodpeckers and other birds.

* It appears at some levels that the loss of all ash trees is inevitable. While this may be true there are measures that can slow the spread of the EAB. It may buy us enough time to learn more and come up with a solution before all the ashes are gone. If everyone keeps a look out for this pest and adheres to the rules of quarantine when the need arises, we have a chance of limiting the damage caused by EAB.

There is considerable more information available than what is contained in this article. The following web sites offer more information with pictures to help you identify this pest. The following addresses and phone numbers offer personnel that can help you as well.

www.aphis.usda.gov

www.na.fs.fed.us/spfo/eab

www.emeraldashborer.info

Toll free information line: 1-866-322-4512

For a FACT SHEET:

Division of Plant Industry – Emerald Ash Borer Program

8995 East Main Street, Reynoldsburg, Ohio 43068

614-728-6437

O.D.A. home page: www.ohioagriculture.gov/eab

To report an infestation call 1-888-OHIO-EAB

WARNING: Transportation of hardwood in any form (firewood, mulch, chips, etc) across any state line is punishable by the imposition of severe fines.