

EMERALD ASH BORER FOUND IN MOUNT PROSPECT

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Earlier this month, Mount Prospect Public Works' arborists found the Village's first evidence of infestation by the dreaded tree killing insect known as the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB). Village staff had long expected that the invasive pest would make its way into MountProspect. Five infested parkway trees were found near the intersection of East Henry and North Albert Streets. The Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDA) confirmed the find several days later. "Our Village foresters finding the Emerald Ash Borer in one of our parkway trees is devastating news for our residents who love their ash trees," said Mayor Irvana K. Wilks. "Infestations were detected in neighboring communities beginning in 2006, but until now the beetle had not begun killing the ashes in Mount Prospect."

"For four years, our foresters worked to develop protocols for identifying EAB beetle infestations, and for disposing of the contaminated wood," Mayor Wilks continued. "Because we have thousands of ashes in both parkways and yards, we must rely on the good people of Mount Prospect to become educated in detecting the beetle in their ashes."

"Mount Prospect has been preparing for this day ever since 2002, when EAB was first found in Michigan", according to Forestry/Grounds Superintendent Sandy Clark. "Our Village Board adopted our official EAB Management Plan in 2009 to formalize and guide our response to this threat. Though we knew it was only a matter of time, it's still heartbreaking to think that we may lose one of every six of our community's trees in the next ten years."

Mount Prospect joins the ever growing list of Illinois communities where EAB has been found. The insect was first found in Illinois in 2006 in Kane County. Since that time it has been found in more than 125 Illinois communities.

Mount Prospect's Forestry/Grounds Division has begun surveying the area around the initial find to see if the extent of the infestation can be determined. Clark said "Because the insects are so small and the majority of their life cycle is spent inside the tree, it is very difficult to find EAB when trees are first infested. She believes that EAB has been present in the infested trees near Henry and Albert for at least two or three years. She also noted that the arrival of Fall will make any additional detections this year more difficult, since bare branches may be due to normal fall leaf drop rather than dieback caused by EAB.

EAB has already caused the death of 20-25 million ash trees in the United States. In response to the new "find", the Village is again asking property owners to watch for any signs that EAB is present in other ash trees. Upon request to the Public Works Department the Village will send to local property owners, a brochure that describes the pest and its symptoms. The brochure can also be picked up at multiple public buildings including the Village Hall and Public Works Department. Additionally, upon request Village arborists will inspect any suspect ash trees within Village limits, whether on public or private property.

The Village plans to remove all of the infested trees immediately and continue to scout for additional infestations. As more infested trees are found on public property, the Village will remove the trees and continue to follow the protocol set forth by the Village's EAB Management Plan and the IDA. Changes to the Village's code regarding EAB are forthcoming and will require property owners to remove infested ash trees at their own expense. The Village will also offer a no-interest loan program to help low-income property owners pay for the removal of privately owned infested trees.

Clark said today that roughly 3900 of Mount Prospect's 25,000 parkway trees (about 1 in 6) are ash trees. Additionally, there are thousands more ash trees on private property in Mount Prospect. Clark noted that experts monitoring the spread of EAB in the United States now report that the economic impacts have been estimated at tens of millions of dollars.

In preparation for the pest's arrival, in 2009 Mount Prospect's Village Board adopted an official EAB Management Plan. Besides educating the public, seeking citizen help and inspecting ashes, in recent years Village staff has been routinely removing bark from suspect ash trees to look for larvae. They have also been deferring most ash removals until non-flight season, in order to avoid inadvertently spreading any adult EAB beetles that may have been present but undetected. Staff also worked with Morton Arboretum and IDA staff on various trapping projects designed to delimit EAB's presence in Illinois. The Mount Prospect Village Board signed an IDA compliance agreement in May 2007, agreeing that Village crews and contractors would handle ash materials in a state-approved manner. Village staff has also actively participated on committees at the state and regional level in an effort to obtain adequate funding and establish "best practices" for municipalities battling EAB.

The Village also began an Ash Reduction program in 2007, in which low quality parkway ash trees were proactively removed and replaced with a wide variety of underutilized species. Unfortunately, budget considerations forced an end to that program after only 208 trees were removed and replaced. On September 28, 2010 the Village Board reviewed a proposal from Forestry/Grounds staff to remove and replace an additional 100-150 parkway ash trees in poor condition. The Board consensus was that the removals should proceed, but due to the current economic situation, replanting should be deferred until such time that additional funds may become available. "We are facing extremely difficult budgetary reductions, which means our focus right now must be on the removal of ash trees rather than replanting," Mayor Wilks said. "For now, replacement of the removed parkway trees can be done next Spring by the property owners through the Village's parkway tree planting permit process."

Additionally, the Village started preventively treating approximately 200 ash trees in 2007 and has since expanded the number of trees to approximately 800 ash trees over the past two years. The trees selected are all White, Blue or Manchurian ash, were at least 7" in diameter at the time the treatment started, and were in good condition and suitable growing sites.

For property owners who can afford it, Clark notes that annual insecticide use may help prevent infestation of healthy private property ashes until such time that a better control is found. (Federal agencies have been studying parasitic wasps and natural predators as biological controls for the future.) A thorough discussion of insecticide considerations can be found on the Village website listed below and in the Village's EAB brochure. With EAB now officially confirmed within the Village, property owners should begin treatments next spring if they intend to try preserving their ash trees. Clark noted that "residents should consider the financial costs of trying to preserve an ash tree, and consider a removal and replacement option as well. If residents would like advice on species that will thrive in our area, we will happily send such information upon request."

"Unfortunately, this find is probably just the tip of the iceberg for EAB in Mount Prospect" Clark said. Citizens can help in these ways: 1) Monitor local ash trees and report to the Village those that may be infested. 2) Use only firewood from a local source and do not take any firewood from the area if you are traveling. 3) Take care of your trees, keep them watered, and use ISA-certified arborists when hiring a tree care company. 4) Don't plant ash trees; instead consider using underutilized species. 5) For high-value privately owned ashes, treat preventively with insecticides if funds are available. 6) Finally, check for periodic updates at the following websites: www.mountprospect.org, www.emeraldashborer.info and www.illinoiseab.com.