



EarthWatch Rhode Island



Topic: DEM Asks the Public to be Alert for Signs of Asian Longhorned Beetles

Date: May 8, 2009

Location: Roger Williams Park, Providence

Background

In response to the discovery and infestation of the Asian Longhorned Beetle (ALB) in Worcester, MA in 2008, the Department of Environmental Management's Divisions of Agriculture and Forest Environment, in cooperation with the USDA/Animal Health Inspection Service, Plant Protection and Quarantine Program is launching an ALB public outreach and survey project. The effort is designed to inform the public about the dangers of ALB, how to identify the beetle, including signs and symptoms, where to report suspected ALB finds, and train volunteers to assist the state in early ALB detection. Outreach programs are being conducted in all the New England states and New York.

An invasive insect that is native to China and other areas of eastern Asia, the ALB was discovered last year in Worcester, MA. The insect is a serious threat to many species of deciduous hardwood trees. The ALB can cause widespread mortality of poplar, willow, elm and maple trees (including the Red Maple, the RI State Tree.) In addition, nursery stock, logs, green lumber, firewood, stumps, roots, branches, and wood debris of a half-inch or more in diameter are subject to infestation. The ALB was first discovered in the United States in 1996 in Brooklyn, New York and has also been found in New Jersey and Chicago. It is believed that the beetle was brought to the US in wooden packing material used in cargo shipments from China.

The beetle is large, ranging from 0.75 – 1.25 inches in length with very long black and white antennae. The body is glossy black with irregular white spots. The distinctive antennae that give the beetle its common name are as long as the body itself in females, and almost twice the body length in males. Adult ALB emerge from late spring to early fall and feed on tree bark and tender twigs. During its larval stage, the ALB bores deep in the tree's heartwood, where it feeds on the tree's nutrients. This tunneling damages and eventually kills the tree. The adult ALB then chews its way out of the tree the next summer, leaving perfectly round exit holes that are approximately 1cm (3/8") in diameter.

Legislation establishing ALB as a nuisance and setting penalties for unlawful importation and transportation of said beetles is moving through the General Assembly with strong support from both Chambers.

News that Channel 10 Viewers Should Know:

1. Firewood transport has been identified as one of the key methods for spreading wood-boring pests from the site of an established infestation. Previous incidents at known ALB-infested sites have demonstrated the need for education regarding the proper use and transport of firewood at all levels, from campers bringing firewood to and from campgrounds, to homeowners offering downed tree limbs for free on the internet, to companies selling and shipping wood across the country.

All Rhode Island residents are reminded to purchase firewood from local sources and not transport firewood from out of state. Firewood brought into Rhode Island from infested areas can easily bring along unwanted hitch hikers like ALB and other harmful forest pests.

Last fall, DEM removed and destroyed a half cord of firewood suspected of carrying ALB larva from a home in Cranston's Friendly Community neighborhood. The homeowners received the wood in July from property they own with a friend in Worcester, MA that had ALB infested trees on site. One piece of wood from a maple tree showed evidence of ALB, with one suspected larva that DEM staff have preserved for identification.

2. The public needs to become familiar with the signs of ALB and report them. Signs of ALB infestation include perfectly round, dime-sized exit holes; frass, a sawdust-like material comprised of tree shaving and insect waste; and oozing sap. Dead and dying tree limbs or branches and yellowing leaves in areas where there has been no drought may also be a sign of ALB. Research indicates this beetle can survive and reproduce in most sections of the country where suitable host trees exist.

If you see these signs, call 866-702-9938 to report your findings. If you think you have seen this insect, please do not disturb infested trees or move any wood that you think could be affected by this pest. The beetles are visible in late July/early August primarily in upper part of trees.

Information and a reporting mechanism is also available on the DEM website at <http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bnatres/agricult/caps.htm#report> People may also contact Liz Lopes-Duguay, senior environmental scientist in the Division of Agriculture at 222-2781 ext. 4510 or 949-1770, or via email her at liz.lopesduguay@dem.ri.gov.

Interviewees:

Elizabeth Lopes-Duguay, senior environmental scientist, DEM Division of Agriculture, provided information about the Asian Longhorned Beetle, and the signs of ALB that everyone should be familiar with and be on the lookout for (dime-size exit holes, beetles, etc.) She also talked about the legislation regarding ALB that is making its way through the General Assembly

Bruce Payton, supervising forester in DEM's Division of Forest Environment, talked about the potential devastating impact ALB could bring to trees in the state, and why it is so important to use only Rhode Island-grown firewood and not bring in firewood from out of state.

Visuals: ALB display kit containing a preserved beetle, informational posters, firewood, host trees.