

Norfolk Insider

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“Emerald Ash Borer – Why Cities are Concerned”

Submitted by Dr. G. Tom Surber, Chairman of the City of Norfolk Tree Advisory Board

First, the bad news: The Emerald Ash Borer Beetle is coming and it has the potential to kill all the ash trees in Norfolk and in the state. Approximately one in five (19%) trees in Norfolk's parks and on our terraces are ash trees. There are many more ash trees on private property in the City.

Second, the good news: The Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) most likely will not be in Norfolk for several years unless someone carries it in on firewood. There are treatments; however, the treatments must be applied every year and they are on the expensive side, especially if one has lots of ash trees. Some treatments are environmentally damaging, harming other plants or animals.



Photo courtesy of Howard Russell,
Michigan State University,
Bugwood.org

The Emerald Ash Borer is a shiny green beetle about one half inch long. To confuse the issue, there are several other similar green beetles already living here and not causing problems with the ash trees. The larvae of EAB bore into an ash tree and tunnel in S shaped burrows under the bark. New adult EAB beetles leave a distinctive “D” shape hole, less than 1/8 inch diameter in the bark as they emerge. Sometimes beetles of other species can leave oblong or elliptical holes, but not the definite “D” of the EAB. The adult beetles spread slowly from ash tree to ash tree. The many invading EAB larvae literally choke the tree to death, preventing the necessary circulation of the sap of the tree.

Historically, from the first identification of EAB in an area, it takes five or more years for the ash trees to start to die. The first change in an ash tree's appearance is a thinning of the foliage. Over three to five years, the branches start to die and fall off then in five or more years the ash tree dies. Very close to 100% of the ash trees in an area will be dead in 15 years from the first infestation.

It's essential to understand that the emerald ash borer is often spread by people hauling infected wood. That is how EAB is already in Colorado, Kansas, Missouri and Iowa. This is the major reason that transporting firewood is now illegal in many areas. The beetle is moving in our direction with it currently found at Creston, Iowa, 65 miles from the Nebraska border.

The Emerald Ash Borer came to the US from Eastern Asia, most likely in wooden pallets. It was first found near Detroit, Michigan. EAB has spread through much of the Northeastern United States killing millions of ash trees.

As far as we know, the Emerald Ash Borer only eats on ash trees. All species of ash – white, green, black, and all varieties such as Autumn Purple and seedless -- are susceptible. The mountain ash is not related to the other ash species except in name only and is not affected. In China the EAB is kept in check by very small parasitic wasps. These wasps, which do not sting humans, prevent the EAB from becoming numerous enough to kill the ash trees.

In Norfolk, the trees on the terraces are the responsibility of the adjacent landowner, not the City. See a future article on more information on planning and actions to take in response to this coming danger. Future articles will deal with steps to take now, when the beetle is found, and in future years.

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