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**Foresters move from education to action as Emerald Ash Borer threat grows**

Village foresters say the question is not if the Emerald Ash Borer will ever reach Oak Park, but when. That's why they are installing traps and checking under the bark of a sampling of the 2,600 ash trees on Village property.

While no EAB infestations have been found in the Village, the voracious insect has been confirmed throughout the area, including in neighboring Chicago and nearby River Grove. Oak Park forestry officials say it likely is just a matter of time before the tiny, but deadly, emerald-green beetles are found here, too.

"EAB is the biggest threat to our urban forest since Dutch Elm Disease," said Village Forester Jim Semelka, who pointed out that ash trees represent nearly 14 percent of the 19,000-plus trees on public property in Oak Park.

"We have been focusing on public education for more than two years, warning about the dangers of bringing the beetle to the Village in firewood, explaining the symptoms of infestation and urging residents to call us with questions and concerns. Now, we are aggressively looking for signs of the beetle."

The Village will hang six special traps in ash trees in various locations in the community, beginning today. The traps are purple, resemble box kites and contain a substance that attracts the beetles. Once inside, a sticky residue holds them, allowing officials to determine if the beetle is present in the area.

The Illinois Department of Agriculture is providing traps to communities throughout Illinois. Some 750 traps are being installed in the Chicagoland area, and another 3,000 traps hung in 49 counties across central and northwestern Illinois and at various high-risk sites such as tree nurseries and campgrounds.

In addition to hanging the traps, Village foresters also will be inspecting the crowns of these trees using an aerial lift truck to look for the small, D-shaped holes left by new adult insects emerging for the first time. Staff also will use special tools to peel back bark on other selected trees to look for the characteristic markings left by the feeding larva.

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## **Emerald Ash Borer**

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"We've been preparing for this effort for some time now," Semelka said. "EAB has been the number one topic of discussion for municipal arborists for that last few years. The budget implications of removals and, of course, the visual impact on the community the loss of our ash trees would have, are on everyone's minds.

"Fortunately, we have been working for the past decade to diversify the species of trees in our municipal forest in Oak Park. Diversity really is the answer to preventing future devastation from an insect or disease like EAB or DED that afflicts a single kind of tree."

The borer is believed to have arrived in the United States in southeastern Michigan as a stowaway in wooden packing materials from Asia, making its way to neighboring states in firewood. The beetle is small and stealth-like in its behavior patterns and is extremely difficult to detect. If not controlled, officials say, EAB threatens to devastate the entire ash species in North America.

Adult ash borers gnaw their way out of trees in early June, emerging from D-shaped holes about one-eighth in diameter. The small, metallic-green beetles — about a half-inch long and an eighth-inch wide — then lay their eggs on fresh bark, often traveling up to a half mile. Once the larvae hatch, they burrow into the tree and carve tunnels into the vascular system, eventually cutting off the flow of nutrients and killing the tree.

The most recognizable signs of infestation are declining tops and deadwood higher up in the tree. Sprouts from the trunk and roots are a somewhat later sign. Removal of infested trees has been the only successful management strategy, officials say.

Anyone with concerns about an ash tree or questions should call 708.358.5700 or e-mail [publicworks@oak-park.us](mailto:publicworks@oak-park.us). Village foresters will check firewood and trees on private property by request.

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