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Destructive Emerald Ash Borer Found in Nemaha County

Last week, the Kansas Department of Agriculture, in conjunction with K-State Research and Extension, and the Kansas Forest Service, confirmed that the highly invasive and destructive Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) is in Nemaha County Kansas. A live EAB larva was found inside a dying ash tree on a private residence in the county on October 14th, 2024. Officials say the pest had been suspected in the area for several years, but only recently have they found a live insect, which is required to make the detection official.

You may have heard of EAB, which is killing ash trees across the US at an alarming rate. It is an exotic, invasive beetle from eastern Russia and northeastern Asia that likely was brought to the U.S. in infested packing material. The beetle threatens urban and rural forests by killing North American ash species and their cultivars. Kansas Forest Service officials note that at least 70 million ash trees have already been destroyed due to the emerald ash borer, and as many as 9 billion North American ash trees will eventually be functionally rooted out and destroyed from the continent.

The discovery in Nemaha County makes 15 Kansas counties in which the emerald ash borer has been confirmed, including Wyandotte (2012), Johnson (2013), Leavenworth (2014), Douglas (2015), Jefferson (2015), Atchison (2016), Doniphan (2017), Shawnee (2017), Miami (2019), Jackson (2019), Brown (2022), Osage (2022), Franklin (2023) and Lyon (2024).

We believe the presence of these beetles is not limited to these counties, and residents of Northeast Kansas should report suspected EAB infestations to the Kansas Forest Service, Kansas Department of Agriculture, or your local extension office immediately.

To determine if the EAB has made your ash tree its new home, look for symptoms on the bark and in the canopy. Woodpeckers eat EAB larvae, so look for light patches of bark and woodpecker holes. The larvae tunnel under the bark and feast on the cambium, the layer just below the bark responsible for water and nutrient movement in the tree. Their feeding can cause splits in the bark with S-shaped tunnels underneath. When the larvae exit the tree, they leave behind small, D-shaped holes.

As the tree loses its ability to access nutrients and water, branches of the tree will start to die. The tree may respond by sending out new sprouts near the trunk or lower canopy (a process called epicormic sprouting). Often, landowners do not notice their trees are infected for several years until the canopy starts to die back.

Even if your ash trees currently do not have the EAB, landowners are encouraged to create a replacement plan for the ash trees on their property to ensure a continually healthy canopy as ash trees decline. A landscape with many types of trees is more resilient to insect, disease, and environmental threats that exist or could occur in the future.

If you notice the EAB in your ash tree, you need to act quickly to save it. Once a tree has lost over 40% of its canopy, the odds of survival even with treatment are very low. Treatments for the EAB include trunk injection, soil drench, or bark spray. These treatments will need to be applied on a regular basis for the rest of the tree's life. recommend talking to a licensed pesticide applicator. The treatments you can find over the counter will not be as effective as those provided by a licensed applicator.

All Kansans are reminded of the recommendation to avoid bringing firewood from another state or county where emerald ash borer has been previously detected. Use local sources for firewood.

If you are unsure whether your ash tree is infected, it is best to contact either the Kansas Forest Service, Kansas Department of Agriculture, or your local extension office to get more information and have your tree evaluated.