

Pest may threaten trees

Asian beetles apparently escaped from a Sacramento warehouse.

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The Asian longhorned beetle, a voracious tree borer that has killed thousands of trees in New York, Chicago and New Jersey, may be loose in Sacramento and threatening the city of trees, state and federal agriculture officials said Wednesday.

Some of the 1 1/2-inch bullet-shaped beetles apparently escaped the Rox Pro warehouse in McClellan Park on June 16, after being discovered in a pallet of decorative building stone imported from China, state agriculture officials said.

It's the first such incident in California, they said, and follows an established pattern of the insect hitchhiking to the United States inside wooden packing crates made of infested trees from China.

"They can go into any kind of hardwoods, but their preference is maples and elms," said Mark Lubinski, a senior entomologist at the California Department of Food and Agriculture. If the beetle proliferates, it could also move into Sierra Nevada maples and fruit trees in thousands of urban backyards and the agricultural Central Valley, he said.

Upon learning of the beetle's presence in Sacramento, officials immediately began an effort to seek out, trap and contain the pest within a 9-square-mile area of McClellan, said Pat Minyard, director of plant health and pest prevention services at CDFG. Minyard added that the effort is expected to last more than a year and cost up to \$800,000. He said the cost will be split with the federal government.

The effort includes a U.S. Forest Service smokejumper team from Redding that will search more than 200 trees this week within one-fourth-mile of the warehouse for the distinctive shiny black and white insect.

"Our effort is to stop it. Fast. It literally takes a tree by tree search," said Forest Service spokesman Matt Mathes. "Once they get into a tree and larvae hatch, not only does it kill the tree, but it multiplies. It's a geometric progression."

Said Minyard, "One of the things I find frightening about this pest is the eradication method ... chopping down trees and chipping them."

Sacramento City Arborist Dan Pskowski said the city's sycamore-dominated canopy includes about 1,500 English elms and 5,000 more Chinese elms and American elms.

While the city has fewer maples, a favorite of the beetle, Pskowski said: "If most insects don't have their first choice, they'll adapt to something else. Hopefully, we'll get it under control before it becomes too widespread."

State officials have set up 200 traps containing ethanol, a beetle attractant, hoping to find the pests inside an area roughly bordered by Marysville and Rio Linda boulevards, Elkhorn Boulevard, Watt Avenue and Haggin Oaks Golf Course.

Nationally, state and federal authorities say they've spent \$168 million to track and eradicate the beetle, a pest native to China, Korea and Japan and first discovered in New York City in 1996.

To date, the shared government efforts have proved unsuccessful, with new discoveries of the beetle as recently as 11 months ago in New Jersey and now in Sacramento.

The discovery in Sacramento, renowned for its extensive hardwood tree canopy, follows the beetle's destructive path in the eastern United States, infesting 6,239 trees in New York City neighborhoods, including Central Park, 630 in several New Jersey cities and 1,553 in the Chicago area.

Thousands of those trees have been removed, the federal government reported. Warehouse officials immediately notified the CDFA after discovering the beetle and researching it on the Internet. Workers saw at least two beetles outside the warehouse, Minyard said Wednesday.

Sacramento Agricultural Commissioner Frank Carl said the county quickly fumigated the warehouse, which is at the corner of Dean Street and Lang Avenue. Carl said he was confident fumigation killed beetles in the pallets, "but we don't know how many might have gotten out the door before fumigation took place."

Chinese shipments of the pallets with stone building materials were also sent to warehouses in Lancaster and San Marcos and later distributed to 93 additional locations in the state, said CDFA spokesman Steve Lyle. But no beetles have been found elsewhere, he said.

The pest is harmless to animals and humans but kills trees when larvae burrow deep within them to feed on food and water conducting vessels.

The feeding eventually kills the tree's life-sustaining cambial layer while the beetles then burrow out of the tree as mature adults.

Female Asian longhorned beetles can lay up to 20 eggs during their one-year lifespan, Lubinski said.

Among possible treatment options in Sacramento, Minyard said, are soil or tree injections of an imidacloprid insecticide. "We've made no decision about whether to do this or not," he said.

Federal agricultural authorities have ruled that all wooden packaging materials imported to the United States after Sept. 16 must be heated or treated with methyl bromide to eliminate the Asian longhorned beetle.

Asian longhorned beetle

- * What: The Asian longhorned beetle, originally found in China, Korea and Japan
- * Danger: Its larvae burrow into fruit and many deciduous trees and eventually kill them
- * Scientific name: *Anoplophora glabripennis*
- * Description: A bullet-shaped beetle, shiny and black with white spots

* Size: Up to 1.5 inches long

* Travels: Arrived in the United States in 1996 and has infested more than 8,000 trees in New York, New Jersey and Illinois. Found June 16 in California inside pallets shipped to the Sacramento area from China and believed to have possibly escaped the warehouse.

* Response: Currently there is no known chemical or biological defense, and the beetle has few natural predators in North America. Thousands of trees have been destroyed to stop its U.S. spread. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has ordered that as of September all wooden packages imported from China be treated with heat or chemicals to destroy the pest. The U.S. Forest Service has sent smokejumpers from Redding to look for the pest in trees near the warehouse at McClellan Park. State and federal authorities said they will spend \$800,000 in California in the next year to trap, monitor and contain the beetle.

Source: Bee research