

Residents ask why more trees must be axed

Homeowners ask if there's no other way to stop spread of Asian longhorned beetle

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A Ruthmar Crescent resident whose two maple trees will be chopped down because his home falls within 400 metres of an Asian longhorned beetle infestation site said the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) should come up with a better plan to eradicate the beetle's spread instead of getting rid of healthy trees.

Don Taylor, who lives in the Jane Street and Finch Avenue area, said he was informed Saturday that the 35-year-old maple trees will be cut down within several weeks in an effort to stop the spread of the Asian longhorned beetle.

Last year's plan to remove all host trees with evident signs of infestation has now been expanded to include the removal of all potential host trees within 400 metres of an infested tree.

Tree removal is set to begin Monday and will last about six weeks. Property owners found to have infected trees on their lots will receive a "notice to dispose" prior to trees being removed.

"We've been here 43 years and by the time they are finished (removing trees), it will look like the bloody Sahara (Desert) out here," Taylor said. "The trees keep the sun off the house. A lot of people here are retired and they enjoy their gardens. If there are no trees, there are no birds. They should have some sort of spray to protect the trees that are on the border (of an infected site)."

The infestation of the Asian longhorned beetle was first discovered in North York and Vaughan two years ago and is centred in the Woodbridge area.

Since September 2003, 16,000 trees have been removed in the initiative and with the new steps, the CFIA said another 7,000 trees would be cut down by year's end.

"I had hoped they caught the problem two years ago but I guess they didn't," Taylor said.

The Asian longhorned beetle does not pose a threat to public health, however it attacks and kills living broadleaf hardwood trees, including maple, horse chestnut, poplar, willow, birch, elm, hackberry, mountain ash, silk tree and sycamore.

The female beetle lays individual eggs into oval egg-laying sites, which often leak sap. The eggs hatch after 10 days and the larva begin feeding on the living tissue inside the tree. In early spring, mature larva pupates in the wood just below the bark. The beetles begin to emerge from the trees in May. They feed, mate and chew egg-laying sites in the bark to deposit their eggs. In Canada, the emergence of the beetles

may continue until the first frost.

Signs of infestation include exit holes one centimeter across in bark and sawdust on branches or the tree base from larvae feeding inside.

Mary Orr, acting inspection manager for the Asian longhorned beetle project, said the infestation has so far been contained in the northwest area of Jane Street and Finch Avenue in North York, close to where tree removal took place last year and in 2003.

"We are removing trees within 400 metres of an infected site because through scientific research, that is how far the female insect is known to fly," she said. "If we take down all the trees within 400 metres hopefully that will solve the problem."

When asked why a spray can't be used to eradicate the infestation, Orr said there is no known effective treatment to banish the beetles.

Once tree removal is complete in the coming weeks, Orr said the CFIA will continue to survey trees in infected areas for two years, adding a secondary plan is not in place should the current removal initiative prove unsuccessful.

Orr said homeowners who wish to replant will be compensated by the CFIA for up to \$300 per tree. But the compensation must be approved by the federal government, which she expects will happen when the House of Commons resumes Sept. 26, although she couldn't say when the issue will be dealt with.

"We want to tell people to keep watching for signs of the beetle," she said, adding trees, nursery stock, firewood and tree pruning cannot be removed from restricted sites as it may cause the beetle to spread outside of the infested area.

The public is asked to report all Asian longhorned beetle sightings by calling the CFIA at 416-665-5055.