

Roughly 16,000 trees lost due to Asian beetles

Massive replanting program already begun in towns

BY JAY BODAS

Staff Writer

The number of trees in Middlesex County that will have to come down to protect against the Asian long-horned beetle has nearly tripled from a previous estimate last spring.

“Our projections are that around 16,000 trees from the combined four areas will be removed in total, with trees coming from both municipal and private property,” said Barry Emens, director of the New Jersey Asian long-horned beetle eradication program. “All potential host trees from within an eighth of a mile from an egg site finding are the ones removed. Our job is to protect other communities in New Jersey as well as other states from this beetle.”

Officials estimated last March that 5,400 would have to come down in the affected towns, which included Avenel, Rahway and Carteret. Linden has since been added to the list, with five infested trees discovered over the last few months.

“Originally, the infestation issue was centered in Carteret, and it then spread to Rahway and Avenel,” Emens said. “We’re doing well with the removal of infested trees, and we have seemed to have cleared it up in those areas, but we did find a little bit more infestation in Linden. There are a total of five new trees that are infested within a relatively small area just north of Wood Street in Linden. One of the five is inside the Rosehill Cemetery.”

In Avenel, the main core of the infestation is localized around Roosevelt Avenue and Blair Road, spreading out to an area roughly one mile by two miles square, Emens said.

“It is just that industrial section of Avenel, and it really doesn’t involve the residential part of it,” he said.

The beetle’s potential hosts include silver and red maples, in addition to horse chestnut trees and some types of birches.

Roughly 40 percent of the street trees in the North Jersey area are maples, and around 11,000 trees have been removed from the combined four areas so far, Emens said.

The beetle eradication program is funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The five infested trees in Linden were identified from late August through September of this year, with the last beetle-infested tree found on Sept. 27, said Emens.

The quarantine area has been expanded from 14.5 miles to 16.5 miles, as a result.

“The quarantine area refers to the boundaries for the zone, whereas the area from which trees are actually being removed is much, much smaller,” Emens said. “We regulate firewood cutters from the tree care industry, and they have agreed to not take host wood from the zone to prevent the beetle’s spread,” he said.

Once a tree is infested, there is no way to save it, Emens said.

Fifty species of nonhost trees, including dogwoods, ginkos and crabapples, will be planted to replace those that are removed, Emens said. The U.S. Forest Service is funding the tree replacement, which began Oct. 17.

“We had a very good first year, and we are hoping to do even better in the second year,” he said.

The plantings will be supervised by the state Department of Environmental Protection’s Division of Forests and Parks, he said.

“They are putting in around 1,300 trees this fall, and that is an ongoing process,” Emens said. “We had planted 688 trees in the spring. Trees will be planted in all four communities this fall as a reforestation process, and it will be continue on through 2006 and 2007.”