

USDA to treat trees in Middlesex, Union counties for beetles

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WASHINGTON (AP) _

More than 20,000 trees in Middlesex and Union counties susceptible to infestation by the Asian longhorned beetle will be treated, the U.S. Department of Agriculture said Monday.

The USDA has set aside \$12 million for the project, slated to begin this month. It's part of the agency's efforts to prevent the beetle from infesting other trees in the area. The trees will be treated with the insecticide imidacloprid, which the USDA says has shown promising results.

The USDA is in the process of removing more than 8,000 trees in the two counties that are infected.

The trees to be treated are in parts of Carteret, the Avenel section of Woodbridge, Rahway and Linden.

The beetle is about less than 2-inches long, has a shiny black body with distinctive white spots and long, black and white antennae.

The beetles eat tunnels through the trees, then pregnant females lay eggs in the bark. The young beetles consume the host trees from the inside.

Signs of beetle infestation include large, round holes anywhere on the tree, darkened wounds in its bark and piles of sawdust at its base.

The beetles were first found in the United States in 1996. Experts believe they came from China in wooden packing material.

Residents can call (732) 815-0140 to have their property checked for the beetles, the USDA said. Residents also can call 1-866-BEETLE1 to report a sighting.